

Translators' Commentary on the Greek New Testament

1 Thessalonians



By
Bob Goethe



North Cove Publishing
Thetis Island, Canada

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible passages were translated by the author, and are from:

*Bob's Enriched Analytic Rendering of the Greek New Testament
into Canadian Standard English
(known as "The Polar BEAR" version).*



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Title Page Photo: The walls of Thessalonica stood from Roman times, through the Byzantine Era, on into the 19th century. However, the Ottomans demolished the walls in 1873-74. This photo of Thessalonica from the Hungarian National Archives was taken by Abdullah Freres sometime in the 1860s, when the walls were still standing.

It is unlikely that these walls were present when Paul visited, since the initial building of these walls went back to the sunset years of the Roman Empire, as Rome's naval mastery of the sea began to slip and communities realized that they were on their own to protect themselves from raids by pirates.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations	1
Preface.....	3
Helpful Insights from Agile Software Development	4
An Inductive-Learning Textbook/Commentary	7
Observe, Interpret, Apply.....	8
Translating a Book About Translating	9
Making the Creative Commons License Practical	9
Introduction	11
First Century Chronology.....	11
To Whom Was This Letter Written, Why, and When?.....	13
Getting a Feel for the City	15
Chapter 1.....	17
1:1	17
1:2-3.....	21
1:4	25
1:5	28
1:6	32
1:7	38
1:8	41
1:9	46
1:10	50
Chapter 2.....	54
2:1	54
2:2	57

2:3	60
2:4	63
2:5	66
2:6	70
2:7	74
2:8	79
2:9	83
2:10	89
2:11	91
2:12	93
2:13	96
2:14	99
2:15	102
2:16	103
2:17	107
2:18	110
2:19	112
2:20	117
Chapter 3.....	119
3:1	119
3:2	120
3:3	121
3:4	122
3:5	126
3:6	132
3:7	136
3:8	138
3:9	140
3:10	143
3:11	145

3:12	148
3:13	150
Chapter 4.....	154
4:1	154
4:2	157
4:3	157
4:4	161
4:5	162
4:6	165
4:7	168
4:8	170
4:9	173
4:10	176
4:11	179
4:12	182
4:13	184
4:14	187
4:15	190
4:16	193
4:17	197
4:18	199
Chapter 5.....	202
5:1	202
5:2	204
5:3	207
5:4	210
5:5	213
5:6	215
5:7	218
5:8	219

5:9	221
5:10	224
5:11	226
Excursus: Paul and Matthew's Gospel	229
5:12	239
5:13	241
5:14	243
5:15	246
5:16	247
5:17	248
5:18	249
5:19-21	253
5:22	255
5:23	258
5:24	260
5:25	261
5:26	262
5:27	263
5:28	265
Translation Helps	267
Flashcards	267
ἀγαπάω in 1 Thess.	269
If Only You Could Read This in the Original Greek	276
Translating Difficult and Obsolete Words	278
Word Studies and Context.....	280
Participles	282
Greek Infinitives	285
WWLLS.....	286
“We Remember You”— μνείαν ποιούμενοι (1 Thess 1:2).....	289
Greenwood and the Aorist Tense.....	289

Prepositions and Lexicons.....	293
Textual Variations.....	298
How to “Go For Coffee with a Greek Scholar”.....	303
Notes for Commentators	312
Translation Philosophy in the Digital Age.....	312
Evaluating AIs.....	313
Teaching Greek Inductively	319
Bibliography	325
Index.....	335
About the Author	337

Abbreviations

a.k.a.	Also known as
c.	Circa—Latin for <i>around</i> . If you do not know the precise date for an event, but you know it was approximately A.D. 213, you could write it as <i>c. A.D. 213</i> .
CEV	Contemporary English Version
ESV	English Standard Version
et al.	An abbreviation of the Latin phrase <i>et alia</i> , which means <i>and others</i> . This abbreviation indicates that there are additional authors or contributors beyond those explicitly named.
f.	And the following page. 97f. means pages 97-98. From Latin word <i>folio</i> meaning <i>leaf</i> or <i>page</i> .
ff.	And the following pages. 97ff. means page 97 and the following pages. Like f., it comes from the Latin word <i>folio</i> .
GNT	Good News Translation (a.k.a. Good News Bible)
Ibid.	An abbreviation of the Latin word <i>ibidem</i> , which means <i>in the same place</i> . In footnotes or endnotes, <i>ibid.</i> is used to refer to the source cited in the immediately preceding note.
KJV	King James Version
LXX	The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament
MS	Manuscript
MSS	Manuscripts
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NET	New English Translation (NET Bible)
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NT	New Testament
op. cit.	An abbreviation of the Latin <i>opere citato</i> , meaning <i>in the work cited</i> . To refer to a volume already cited in an earlier footnote.
Phillips	J.B. Phillips' translation of the NT

PB	The Polar BEAR, the author's translation of the NT ¹
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLGNT	Society of Biblical Literature edition of the Greek New Testament—this is the edition of the Greek New Testament that was used in this commentary
s.v.	An abbreviation of the Latin <i>sub verbo</i> , meaning <i>under the word</i> . BDAG s.v. αὐτός 3 means <i>look at major definition 3 in the BDAG entry for αὐτός</i> .
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
UBS	United Bible Societies edition of the Greek New Testament
v.	verse
vv.	verses

¹ BEAR: **B**ob's **E**nriched **A**nalytic **R**endering of the Greek New Testament into Canadian Standard English.

Preface

STEPBible (www.STEPBible.org) has developed some terrific tools to help you engage with the Scriptures in the original Greek and Hebrew. But sometimes, it is helpful to be able to *look over the shoulder* of another translator as you do your own work. This is what commentaries are all about. Their authors are the ones with whom you can share your own translation questions.

The problem STEP has is that the list below is typical of the commentaries that it offers, as of September of 2024:



Being an old book is not necessarily a bad thing. C.S. Lewis once said that if we wanted to avoid theological error, *The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books.*¹

Also of interest is a quote from John Wesley (whose commentaries [1791] are available further down in this scrolling listbox).

¹ Lewis, C.S., *Introduction to Athanasius: The Incarnation of the Word of God*, trans. by A

Religious of C.S.M.V. (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 7.

Preface

Do I understand Greek and Hebrew? Otherwise, how can I undertake (as every minister does), not only to explain books which are written therein, but to defend them against all opponents? Am I not at the mercy of every one who does understand, or even pretends to understand, the original? For which way can I confute his pretence?

...Do I understand the language of the New Testament? Am I a critical master of it? Have I enough of it even to read into English the first chapter of St. Luke? If not, how many years did I spend in school? How many at the university? And what was I doing all those years? Ought not shame to cover my face?¹

So Wesley absolutely shared the values that STEP Bible exemplifies.

That said, none of these commentaries (not even Wesley's) are going to help you answer the question of *Why did Luke used the genitive case when he wrote τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος in Acts 1:8*. To answer this sort of question, you need what is called a technical commentary.

There are top-flight technical commentaries on every biblical book available to the person who has a few thousand dollars to spend on his library. But because all of these commentaries are fairly recent, and are still under copyright, they are not available for STEP Bible to share at no cost with its users.

Helpful Insights from Agile Software Development

While I worked my entire adult life in “full-time Christian service”,² only the first quarter of my career was spent in missions to Japan or in ministry with Canada's Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.

Three quarters of my working life was spent in medical software development, during which time I was very much involved in what is called *agile software development*.

¹ Wesley, John. "An Address to the Clergy." In *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10, edited by Thomas Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 486.

² Indeed, as there are no *part-time positions* available.

Preface

The traditional approach to creating computer software is that you plan out your entire software development process in advance, and then you work the plan.¹ The customers² only get to use the software after it is complete.

In contrast, with agile development you try to provide the customer something that solves a business problem—that makes their professional life a bit easier—immediately. You also provide lots of incremental releases of your software, in each release trying to deliver functional software that does a little bit more than the last release, each time gathering customer feedback to factor into the development process.³

Application to This Volume

When I considered the commentary situation at STEP, it was not unlike walking into a business setting where the software needs are huge, and the problems all need solving yesterday.

Developing a good commentary can be the work of a lifetime. But I asked myself, could I use agile principles to deliver a commentary that would be helpful to STEP users quickly, expecting and planning for it to require revision absolutely as soon as it is released.

The next question I had was, *Has artificial intelligence (AI) developed enough that it can ‘read and understand’ Koine Greek?* If so, then AI could be a powerful tool in delivering a useful commentary quickly.

The Object of the Exercise in any Biblical Translation Work

Translating Scripture is different from developing commercial software, since my goal in translation is not to finish as quickly as possible but to have my translation work become the foundation of my daily quiet time. My objective is

¹ This is an effort to create software with the same approach that is used for building a building. In that, most of the work is in the planning stage. Once you have the plan created, you can get semi-skilled labor to actually construct the building.

² In my case, all of the *customers* were internal to the hospital group.

³ I found that a true proverb was *The user doesn't know what he wants. He only knows that what you just gave him isn't quite it.*

It is often the case that people only get a clear idea on what they would find helpful in a software package as they begin to use it. The traditional approach to development assumes that you can ask the user, in advance, what their software should do when complete, and that they can give you a good answer.

Preface

that I should ponder what I read, and think about how the Holy Spirit might have me apply it in my life, to the end that I become more and more like Jesus Christ.

In his preface to Hort's commentary on 1 Peter, Westcott said that for Hort,¹ *the main question always was how the truths with which each Apostolic writer dealt entered into his own soul and life, and so how we can represent them in terms of our own age and how they affect us.*² And that Hort approached each phrase as if it came to him directly from its author. He asks at once naturally and without effort, "What did the words mean to him who wrote them, and to those who first received them?"³

While none of us will be able to match the scholarship of Hort, we can all learn from his basic approach to Scripture, and aspire to combine our Greek study with a passionate love for God.

This means that before I asked even a single question to an AI about the text of 1 Thessalonians, I spent several weeks translating the letter, and making notes on everything I learned.

Fitting AI into My Approach to the Bible

Having done the work of translating 1 Thessalonians, and having tried to drill down into the verses—both in terms of understanding the language, and also in terms of its meaning and application in my life—I was now ready to make use of AI in the role of an eager research assistant, to help me develop a usable commentary in as little time as possible.

I am not in the least like the English student who wants to cheat by surreptitiously getting ChatGPT to write his essay. Rather, I am telling you up

¹ If the names Westcott and Hort do not ring a bell with you, know that the lion's share of the work done to establish the precise text of the New Testament, as it was written by the original authors, was done by B.F. Westcott and J.F.A. Hort. They labored over a period of 28 years, finally publishing their Greek NT in 1881. With very few modifications, the SBLGNT text

that stands behind this commentary was mostly established by Westcott and Hort over a century ago.

² B.F. Westcott, Preface to J.F.A. Hort's *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1898), xii.

³ Ibid., x.

front that I attempted to wring every last bit of benefit from AI to come up with a technical commentary that might be helpful to you.¹

The guidelines for using AI that have been published by the Author's Guild² describe my use of AI:

1. Use AI as an assistant for brainstorming, editing, and refining ideas rather than a primary source of work, with the goal of maintaining the unique spirit that defines human creativity. Use AI to support, not replace, this process.
2. To the extent you use AI to generate text, be sure to rewrite it in your own voice before adopting it. If you are claiming authorship, then you should be the author of your work.

That I employed this approach was not because I was trying to follow somebody's guidelines,³ but because I found that AI had practical limits in 2025. It was practical only to use AI as a research assistant, not as a co-author.

An Inductive-Learning Textbook/Commentary

My target reader for this volume has had just two semesters of Greek—somewhere between 50 and 80 hours of instruction. Hence, this commentary is almost more of a textbook for learning Greek inductively, from the text of 1 Thess., than it is a conventional commentary. It is a hybrid, lying somewhere between a traditional commentary and a Greek textbook.

In a regular Greek textbook, you start with simple concepts and work your way up to more difficult aspects of the language. In this volume, we will address Greek grammar as it comes up in Paul's writing.⁴

I shall assume that you are already completely at home with the Greek alphabet. So if I write ἐφ' ὑμῖν, you can read it instantly. But if I write *eph humin*, you have

¹ The tool I found most helpful was Anthropic, *Claude 3.5 Sonnet* (Large Language Model), October 22, 2024 Version, <https://claude.ai/new>.

² Authors Guild, "AI Best Practices for Authors", *The Authors Guild*, <https://authorsguild.org/resource/ai-best-practices-for-authors/>.

³ I started investigating what people were saying about the ethical use of AI only after I finished writing the commentary.

⁴ For instance, when we run into οἶδα in 2:1, we do not just translate it as it appears in this verse, but use it as a springboard into a more general discussion of *defective verbs*.

to think about it for a moment. By this time, you should find Greek easier to read if it is NOT transliterated into the Latin alphabet.

Observe, Interpret, Apply

Technical commentaries on biblical books are typically very strong when it comes to **observation** of what is in the text—asking what the biblical author is saying, and how did he go about expressing himself.

They are also good when it comes to **interpretation**—asking what is the significance of the facts of the text that were just observed, and how they relate to passages or language uses elsewhere in the Bible.

They typically do not touch on **application** at all. They leave it to the individual reader/teacher/preacher to decide how a passage might apply in their own setting.

What I have done in this volume is to be more detailed in my observations (How should we render this genitive noun in this verse?) and interpretations (Why did the author use the genitive case? How would it have changed the meaning of the verse had he used an accusative noun instead?). But especially, I want to model for you how I let my Greek study shape my thinking about how it applies in everyday life.

For some people, Greek translation can become almost more of an intellectual exercise than an encounter with the living God. So my commentary has a great deal more of a first-person flavor than any technical commentary I have ever seen. Translating Greek is what slows me down enough to really think about the passage I am reading. My best times of communing with Jesus are frequently had while I am translating Greek.

To the extent possible in a book, with readers who are not known to me personally, I would like to say, Be an imitator of me and of the Lord (1:6), and let your time with your Greek New Testament be primarily about applying Scripture in your life.

Further, I am quite deliberate in being very personal in the things I share. While there are severe limits to how much I can do this in a book, I would like to be like Paul and share not only how to translate passive voice verbs, but my very own self with you (2:8). So in this volume, you will not only get a feel for how

the Apostle Paul followed Jesus, but for how Paul's life and thinking is in turn shaping Bob Goethe's life.

I will shade the paragraphs that are particularly oriented toward application, containing my reflections on the implications of the verse in question. If you are just looking for translation helps, you can safely skip these shaded portions.¹

Translating a Book About Translating

My French-speaking friends tell me that Perplexity.AI does a fairly good job of translating from English to French. And the only practical way to get a translation of this work done quickly is to use an AI.

But when I say something like *the genitive expresses what we normally use of or from for in English*, I recognize that the AI's translation into French may not be clear. Please forgive me, and post any suggestions you have in the *Reviews* section at the bottom of the page at <https://Archive.org>. I will ask my French-speaking friends for help in understanding and incorporating your suggestions.

This may be, however, a place for the Creative Commons License to become useful (see below). I encourage you to use this volume as a starting point, a catalyst, to compose your own translator's commentary for students of New Testament Greek.

Making the Creative Commons License Practical

Many of you, as you use this commentary, will think of ways you could improve on it if you were writing a commentary of your own. This is good! The quickest way to get those improvements out the door is not to write a completely new commentary from scratch, but to *modify* this commentary. But how to do that?

You have taken a look at the Creative Commons license I have used in releasing this commentary—available on the back side of the title page. And you may say, *This sounds generous. But if I have to cite Bob for the work he did, and then distinguish between Bob's original text and the changes I make, I could have 1,723 footnotes in my commentary!*

¹ ...though of course, from my perspective, they are the most interesting parts of this commentary.

Preface

This level of citation is not necessary. Rather, it will be adequate for you to include a clear statement at the beginning of the adapted work that:

- Explains that the work is an adaptation, briefly describing the nature of the changes; e.g., *This is an expanded version of A Translator's Commentary on 1 Thessalonians by Bob Goethe. Where the original included such-and-such portions, they have been revised.* Alternatively you might say, *This is a translation and a thoroughgoing revision of Bob Goethe's commentary to cast it into Vietnamese.*
- Provides a link to the original version of this commentary <https://archive.org/details/1-thessalonians-commentary>.
- Includes a link to the CC BY-SA 4.0 license.

Introduction

First Century Chronology¹

Year	Event	NT Books	High Priest King Governor EMPEROR	Reign
5 BC	Jesus is born		Herod	37-4 BC
AD 1	Paul is born		AUGUSTUS	31 BC-AD 14
			Archileaus	4 BC-AD 6
			Annas	6-15
26	Jesus begins public work		TIBERIUS	14-37
30	Jesus dies, rises, ascends		Caiaphas	18-36
			<i>Pilate</i>	26-36
35	Stephen is martyred			
	Philip's missionary journey (Acts 8)			
35-36	Paul is converted (Acts 9:1-30)			
40-50		Matthew	CALIGULA	37-41
47-48	Paul's 1 st journey (Acts 13:2-14:26)		Herod Agrippa	41-44
48	Paul in Antioch	Galatians	CLAUDIUS	41-54
49-51	Paul's 2 nd journey (Acts 15:36-18:11)		Ananias	47-58
50	Paul in Corinth	1 Thess. 2 Thess.		
52-56	Paul's 3 rd journey (Acts 18:23-19:20)		<i>Felix</i>	52-58
			NERO	54-68
54-55	Paul in Ephesus	Philippians 1 Cor.		

¹ Adapted from William F. Beck, *The New Testament in the Language of Today* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), xi.

Introduction

		Philemon		
		Colossians		
55	Paul in Macedonia (Acts 19:21-20:1)	Ephesians		
		2 Cor.		
56	Paul in Corinth	Romans		
58-59	Paul imprisoned in Caesarea			
58-59	Luke gathers eyewitness accounts for his gospel	Luke		
59-61	Paul imprisoned in Rome (Acts 28:15- 31)		<i>Festus</i>	58-60
60		Mark		
61		Acts		
		James		
61-62		1 Peter		
		2 Peter		
62	Paul in Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3)	1 Timothy		
63	Paul to Nicopolis (Titus 3:12)	Titus		
64	Paul dies in Rome	2 Timothy		
63-66	Zealots drive Christians from Palestine – Many, incl. John, relocate to Asia			
60-70		Jude	GALBA	68-69
		John		
64-70		Hebrews	OTHO	69
66-70	Jewish War		VITELLIUS	69
70	Jerusalem destroyed		VESPASIAN	69-79
			TITUS	79-81
85-99		1 John	DOMITIAN	81-96
		2 John		
		3 John		
		Revelation		
			NERVA	96-98
			TRAJAN	98-117

The issues of chronology are not as cut-and-dried as might be suggested by this table; many are debated. I am including here my conclusions, particularly as pertains to the dating of gospel composition, without further comment.

However, there are some supporting bits touched on in this work. For instance, in the chapter *Notes for Commentators > Evaluating AIs*, I include a discussion of John 5:2 which will help you understand why I date the composition of John's gospel in the A.D. 60s rather than 25 or 30 years later, as is more typically thought.

And in the section entitled Paul and Matthew, at the middle of chapter 5, I discuss how I concluded that Matthew was the first gospel to be written, and that Paul had a written copy of it at his elbow as he composed this letter to the Thessalonian believers.

To Whom Was This Letter Written, Why, and When?

Paul's first visit to Philippi, probably around A.D. 50, is described in Acts 16. In verse 16, Luke reports that he stayed there for *several days*, enough time for Paul to see the conversion of Lydia and the Philippian jailer, and the establishment of a community of believers.

Upon his departure, he went to Thessalonica, apparently for just three weeks (Acts 17:2), and established a church there as well.

However, in Philippians 6:16, Paul says *For in Thessalonica, more than once you sent me help when I was in need*. Given that Philippi and Thessalonica were 100 miles (160 km) apart, it would be a multi-day journey to travel between these cities. This makes it seem like Paul's sojourn in Thessalonica lasted for longer than three weeks—though we don't know how *much* longer.

The young Christian community in Thessalonica, concerned for Paul's well-being, sent him away by night to Berea (Acts 17:10). When trouble arose with the Jews in Berea as well, Paul left for Athens. Silas and Timothy followed on behind. But Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, to assess how the young church was doing (1 Thess. 3:1-3).

Reading the epistles of the New Testament is like listening to somebody talk on the phone. You can hear the answers, but you have to infer what the matching questions were. We read the answers in the NT, and have to infer what the problems were. When Paul makes a point of saying:

Introduction

Don't pour cold water on the work of the Holy Spirit. Never treat prophecies with contempt. But on the other hand, think carefully about everything, and hold tightly onto that which is good. (5:19-21)

...we infer that the Thessalonian church may have been having a problem with false prophets.

There were a number of other problems, alluded to in this epistle. Some people were apparently slandering Paul, suggesting that *he was only in it for the money*. Some were so convinced of the imminent return of Jesus that they left their jobs. Some were worried about the fate of their loved ones who had died prior to the return of Jesus. It appears that others were toying with the idea that sexual immorality was compatible with following Jesus.

This latter issue seems to be one that we continue to face today. In a 2019 web post, David Ayers reports on study data indicating that by age 22, 50% of never-married evangelicals in the United States have already had four or more sexual partners.¹

Paul left Athens and travelled on to Corinth, from where he wrote this letter to the church in Thessalonica, around A.D. 50.

F.F. Bruce has an interesting discussion of the Delphi inscription, which reproduces a letter from Claudius to Thessalonica, granting the citizens certain privileges and making reference to Gallio, proconsul of Achaia. Given what we know from elsewhere about Gallio, it becomes possible to date the letter of 1 Thessalonians to A.D. 50, just weeks or months after Paul visited the city.²

¹ To speak more precisely, 52% of the young men, and 43% of the young women.

David J. Ayers, "Sex and the Single Evangelical", Institute for Family Studies, 14 August 2019, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/sex-and-the-single-evangelical>.

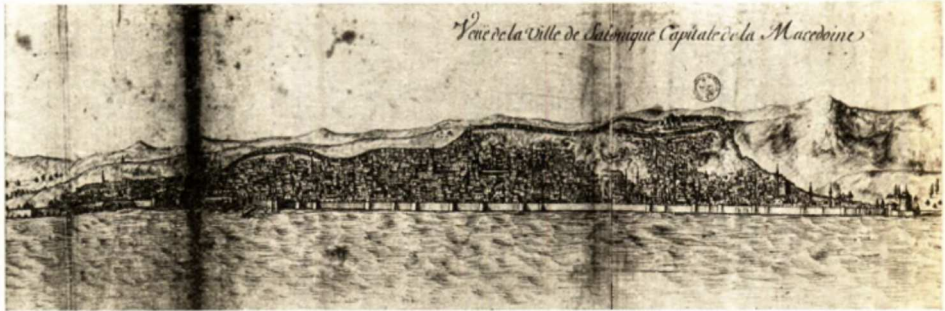
We will go ahead and call these promiscuous people *evangelicals*, even

though a reading of 1 Thessalonians might make you wonder if they have actually ever been born again.

² F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1982), xxxv. Also see page 8.

Getting a Feel for the City

We have no images of the city from Paul's time. But it is still possible to get a general feel for the area.



Sketch of Thessalonica, as seen from an approaching ship, made by Gravier d'Otières in 1686.



"Plan d'une partie des murailles de la ville de Salonique"¹

"Plan of a part of the walls of the city of Thessalonica", highlighting the layout of Thessalonica's sea walls and its single sea-gate.

These are part of a series of drawings² made as part of a French military survey of the region, entitled:

"Estât des Places que les Princes Mahométans possèdent sur les côtes de la Mer Méditerranée et dont les plans ont été levez par ordre du Roy à la

¹ Salonica was an alternative name used for the city, particularly during the Ottoman period.

² Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (MS fr. 7176).

Introduction

faveur de la visite des Eschelles de Levant que sa Majesté a fait faire les années 1685,1686 et 1687".

"State of the Places that the Mohammedan Princes possess on the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea and of which the plans have been drawn up by order of the King during the inspection of the Levantine ports that His Majesty had carried out in the years 1685, 1686 and 1687".



Thessalonica today (Public Domain Photo¹). The defensive wall of stone has been replaced by a wall of condominiums and hotels.

¹ <https://www.goodfreephotos.com/albums/greece/thessaloniki/port-and-city-center-of-thessaloniki.jpg>

Chapter 1

1:1

From Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace to you.

Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος *Paul, Silas, and Timothy*. In a greeting, it was standard to indicate the writer(s) of the letter in the nominative case. If we were back-translating from English to Greek using our own letter-writing conventions, we would probably write these names in the genitive rather than the nominative—Παύλου καὶ Σιλουανοῦ καὶ Τιμοθέου **From** *Paul, Silas and Timothy*.

To make this read well to the modern reader, the PB, GNT, NLT et al translations write the names using the modern convention of *From*, in spite of the names appearing in the nominative in Greek.

You can follow your preference whether to render Σιλουανὸς as Silas, as he is always called in Acts,¹ or Silvanus,² as Paul calls him here. Silvanus is a Latin form of his name,³ while Silas is the Greek version of the Aramaic שִׁילָא, itself a version of the Hebrew *Saul*.⁴

The standard format for beginning a letter in ancient times was *A to B, greetings*.⁵ We see this in Ezra 7:12—*Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven. Peace*. This is what the Thessalonians would have expected in a letter, and it is just what Paul gave them.

¹ So the GNT, NIV and NLT.

² So the ESV.

³ Silvanus comes from the Latin word "silva" meaning "wood" or "forest". The name literally translates to "of the woods" or "of the forest" We do something similar to this

with the last name of the English author of naval fiction, C.S. Forester.

⁴ Joseph J. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles, The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 564

⁵ Bruce, *Thessalonians*, op. cit., 5.

Another example of the standard letter-writing convention is from one of the papyri discovered by Grenfell and Hunt at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, around 1897.



This was written in *longhand* and is more difficult to read than the careful Greek of Codex Vaticanus or Codex Sinaiticus, which was produced by trained scribes. Starting from the upper right corner, we read:

Ἰλαρίων Ἀλῆτι τῇ ἀδελφῇ πλεῖστα χαί-
ρειν....

*Hilarion to Alis my wife, many greetings.*¹

Timothy was not just a helper but a preacher as well (2 Cor. 1:9). He and Silas had been cofounders of the Thessalonian church, along with Paul (cf. Acts 17:1-9). They were also active in composing this epistle with Paul.

The notion of a quiet study or office where you could go to work on your own simply did not exist in lower and middle class Roman homes, which were smaller than average Canadian homes. There was a common area

¹ B.P. Grenfell and Hunt, A.S., eds. *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Volume IV* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1904) 246-247, papyrus no. 744.

Transcription and image both available at:
<https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;4;744>.

This papyrus is particularly well-known because it contains a letter from a man named Hilarion to his wife Alis, and is often cited in discussions of family life in Roman Egypt. It's dated to 1 B.C. and contains some rather remarkable personal content, including instructions about a

potential child's fate.

I am staying in Alexandria. I ask you and entreat you, take care of the child, and if I receive my pay soon, I will send it up to you. Above all, if you bear a child and it is male, let it be; if it is female, cast it out. You have told Aphrodisias, "Do not forget me." But how can I forget you? Thus I'm asking you not to worry.

It is also interesting because the letter is dated to The 29th year of Caesar, Pauni 23, or June 17, 1 B.C. This gives handwriting specialists a date to use in comparing other documents that use a similar writing style.

where you could write. But this was truly a common area. Everybody in the household passed through, making the dictating of a letter more of a communal event than it would ever be in 21st century Canada.

Paul indicates that he had others helping to provide input in both of his letters to Corinth, as well as those to Galatia, Philippi, Colossae, and Philemon.

There is an ongoing archaeological excavation of a residential apartment block in Ephesus that can give us a feel for the living arrangements of elite classes in the Roman period. Lower and middle class homes would be much smaller. These photos are by the author.





Likely Timothy and Silas were in the room with Paul as he dictated his letter, and the three of them discussed together as he composed it. The multiple uses of *we* in this letter reinforce that impression.

καὶ...καὶ... and...and.... In Greek, stringing multiple instances of *καὶ* together was considered good style. In modern English, we have evolved the notion that when we wish to include a list in a sentence, it is better to use *and* just once in a sentence, at the end, with preceding items in the list separated by commas.

As translators, our job is to render the text so that people respond to Paul's words just as the original readers in Thessalonica would have responded. So having people say to themselves as they read our English translation, *This is quirky* takes away from having people focus on the content of Paul's letter.

τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ *to the church* captures one very common use of the dative case: to answer the question of *to whom did he write?*. In saying τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Paul is saying that this is a letter **to** the church.

Θεσσαλονικέων *of the Thessalonians*. This illustrates a common use of the genitive case. To express what we use *of* or *from* to express in English, or to indicate possession (which we express with an apostrophe-s, as in *Bob's ball*).

ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ *in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* is typical of the greetings Paul would use in several of his letters. The preposition

ἐν is always followed by a dative noun or pronoun, and so it is here. The words θεῷ πατρὶ and κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ are all in the dative case.

You may be puzzled for a moment by Ἰησοῦ, which looks like a genitive ending. But there are words in Greek—particularly names that originated in another language, such as this name which comes from Hebrew—which do not have the expected case endings. With *Jesus*, the word forms are:

Nominative:	Ἰησοῦς
Genitive:	Ἰησοῦ
Dative:	Ἰησοῦ
Accusative:	Ἰησοῦν

It is obvious that Paul did not have an objective here of developing a full picture of who God is. Yet verses like this, which imply a similar status for God the Father and Jesus, provided the raw material from which Tertullian (c. A.D. 213) and subsequent Christian thinkers started to pull together an orderly idea of *the Trinity*.¹

χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη *grace to you and peace*. Since this is an idiomatic formula for beginning a letter, we do not worry about the missing verb or trying to analyze why both χάρις and εἰρήνη are in the nominative case.

ὑμῖν *to you* is in the dative case, which is the case most often used for the indirect object of the verb—even where the verb is implied rather than stated.

1:2-3

We always give thanks to God for all of you, as we remember you in our ongoing prayers, and reflect on your faithful deeds, your works of love, and the enduring consistency of your confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ, living your lives as though you were in the very presence of our God and Father.

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν *We give thanks* is in the present tense, indicating an ongoing action.

¹ Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," trans. Peter Holmes, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 3:597-627.

Available at
https://ccel.org/ccel/tertullian/against_praxeas/anf03.v.ix.i.html.

τῷ θεῷ¹ to God also illustrates the common use of the dative case, as did ὑμῖν in verse 1—to indicate the indirect object.²

In verse 1, θεῷ God appears with no article. In this verse, it does have the article τῷ θεῷ. There seems to be no rhyme or reason behind the presence or absence of the article before proper names in the New Testament, be it the name of God, Jesus, or whoever.

Proper names in Greek can appear with or without the definite article. The presence or absence of the article doesn't necessarily change the meaning, as proper names are inherently definite.

There are complex and nuanced discussions as translators have struggled to find patterns in the presence, or absence, of the article with θεός. But the most straightforward approach is to determine from the context. We know that the bedrock of Judaism was that there was only one God. If the passage you are working with is referring to this one God, then translate θεός as *God*, with or without the article. If, as in Acts 7:40 or 14:11, the word is being used in a polytheistic context, translate it as *god*.

πάντοτε *always*. With the adverb Paul is saying that he, Timothy, and Silas are praying for their brothers and sisters in Thessalonica every day.

περὶ is one of the prepositions that has its translation vary, depending on the case of the noun or pronoun that follows it. When translating a prepositional phrase, you need to work from the back forward. In this case it is followed by a genitive. So Paul is saying we pray *about* or *concerning* πάντων ὑμῶν *all of you*.

μνείαν ποιούμενοι *we are doing remembering*, i.e. *we remember*. In this phrase, we run into our first participle. It will not be our last. Participles are an enormously flexible component of Koine Greek, and we will see them over and over again in

¹ εὐχαριστέω (to give thanks) is a compound verb that implies its own direct object. **We give.** We give **what?** We give **thanks.** The implied word *thanks* is effectively the direct object. This makes the indirect object more clear. We give thanks...**to whom?** To **God**.

² Greenwood, Kyle. *Dictionary of English Grammar for Students of Biblical Languages* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 74.

Many of us are fuzzy on the meaning of grammatical terms even when they apply in English as well as Greek. This book will be helpful on many terms.

Paul's writing. *Flexible*, however, translates into *difficult for us*, since participles can be used in so many different ways.

In this case, we are introduced to what is called the temporal participle—a participle that has a time component of some sort to it.

In this verse of Paul's letter, the main verb is Εὐχαριστοῦμεν, *We give thanks*. The participle is ποιούμενοι, and is a nominative plural present middle masculine. The nominative tells you that it refers to the subject of the sentence. In this case, that would be the *We* that is implied by the first person plural verb Εὐχαριστοῦμεν.

Temporal participles are translated along the lines of *When such-and-such happened* or *Before such-and-such happened* or *After such-and-such happened*.

In this case, because it is a present participle, a good translation might be *We give thanks when we remember...* or *We give thanks as we remember...*¹

You may wonder about translating μνείαν ποιούμενοι as *to remember*. ποιούμενοι is from the verb ποιέω, *to do, to make, to produce*. So Paul has phrased this as *When we do remembrance*. But this is too awkward to take into English just so. Better is to take *when we do remembering* and translate it as *when we remember*.

ἐπὶ can be a problem for you in translating, as none of the most common renderings of this preposition make any sense in the context of verse 2. However, as you run your eye down the list of possible translations of ἐπὶ when followed by a genitive noun, and keeping in mind the time-related context provided by the participle, you find *in/at the time of* and realize that this rendering DOES make sense in this context.²

Hence, *We give thanks for all of you when we remember you at the time of our continual prayers*.

In English, the ἐπὶ is a bit redundant. The NLT smooths this verse out and renders it as, *We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly*.

¹ Refer to the chapter in this book called *Translation Helps*, and go to the section on *Participles and Time*.

² BDAG, ἐπί s.v. definition 18.

Typically, Greek sentences contain a *main verb*—a *finite verb*¹. The absence of a main verb in verse 3 tells us that we are seeing one of the long, run-on sentences that Paul is so fond of, a sentence that started in verse 2 and continues in verse 3.

μνημονεύοντες *remembering* is another present participle, probably with a time-related function, connected with the main verb at the beginning of verse 2: **Εὐχαριστοῦμεν**. We give thanks *when* we remember and *when* we consider/reflect on your deeds.

Normally, in Greek, the object of a verb is in the accusative case. But when the verb has to do with remembering or forgetting, the object will be in the genitive case (**ἔργου, κόπου** and **ὑπομονῆς**).

So Paul and his friends are remembering the Thessalonians' works **τοῦ ἔργου** of *faith* (i.e. their faithful deeds) and their actions **τοῦ κόπου** of *love*, and the consistency **τῆς ὑπομονῆς** of *their confidence/hope* in Jesus.

Since there is not just one act of faith and not just one act of love that Paul is remembering, we are left wondering why ἔργου and κόπου are singular rather than plural nouns. First, there is a feature of Greek called the collective singular, where a singular noun can refer to many things.²

Second, there is a parallel structure in this verse, where Paul refers to:

1. τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως *faithful deeds*
2. τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης *works of love*
3. τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος *endurance in hope*

The third item in this list is definitely a singular, and Paul may have decided it was good style to make the first and second singulars as well.³

¹ That is, a verb in the indicative, imperative, subjunctive, or optative mood. Infinitives and participles are NOT finite verbs.

² We do this in English when we say something like *The automobile transformed North American culture*. Of course, it was more than just one auto that did this.

There were millions of them ☞ the *collective singular*.

³ This is a good time for you to refer to the chapter at the end of this book called *Translation Helps*, and to go to the section called *Going For Coffee with a Greek Scholar*.

One benefit of reading Greek is that when you see differences between translations, you can look back at the source and say, *Aha! I see now they were all trying to solve the same translation problem. In a sense, they are all correct.*

ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν *in the presence of our God and Father* could either be attached (as in the NIV) to Paul's act of praying and remembering at the beginning of the verse, or it could be attached to how the Thessalonian believers are living out their lives (as I have done in the PB).

It is your job as a translator to look at the context, first of these immediate verses, and then of the rest of 1 Thessalonians, next of all of Paul's writings, and finally the context of the whole New Testament, and to try and put yourself in Paul's mind. Then you make a decision on how best to render the verse yourself.

There is no question that the NIV translators are all dramatically better Greek scholars than I am, and so you should probably lean in their direction rather than mine as you produce your own translation.

πατρὸς looks at first glance like a nominative, because it has an —ὸς ending. But the dictionary form of this word is πατήρ, and πατρὸς is indeed genitive. τοῦ θεοῦ and πατρὸς both genitive, doing the work that in English is done with the word *of*—*of God* and *of Father*. ἡμῶν is possessive. So this verse is not just about being in the presence of God the Father, but of *our God and Father*.

1:4

We know, brothers and sisters—loved by God—that he has chosen you.

The SBLGNT omits the τοῦ before θεοῦ in this verse, following Tregelles and (surprisingly enough) the late, Medieval manuscript tradition. Westcott & Hort as well as the translators of the NIV include the τοῦ.

Since we are interested in God's Word, we are naturally interested to know exactly what Paul wrote here. However, the presence or absence of the τοῦ is an untranslatable distinction in English. So it makes no practical difference for us.

εἰδότες *having known* is a perfect nominative masculine plural participle of οἶδα *to know*. It agrees with the implied subject *we* from the main verb εὐχαριστοῦμεν in verse 2.

The perfect active tense of εἰδότες denotes a completed action with ongoing results. Paul, Timothy, and Silas knew in the past that the Thessalonian believers were loved and chosen by God, and they still know it to be true today.

In this context, the participle εἰδότες is functioning as though it was a finite,¹ transitive² verb,³ so even though it is technically part of a run-on sentence in Greek,⁴ the PB starts a fresh sentence with this verse.

In Paul's letters, this structure of MainVerb-Participle-Participle-Participle is not uncommon and was a way that he conveyed a flow of related thoughts. However, attempting to translate it directly into English as a single sentence can result in a cumbersome, hard-to-follow structure.

ἀδελφοὶ *brothers and sisters* is tagged by StepBible as a vocative, which is to say Paul is using it in a direct address. There is no difference between the word forms of ἀδελφοὶ as a nominative plural and ἀδελφοὶ as a vocative plural. STEP Bible tags it as it does because of the context: it is clear that Paul is not talking *about* the believers in Thessalonica. He is talking directly *to* them.

Unless the context makes it clear that only men are present or being referred to, the plural ἀδελφοὶ regularly refers to both men and women. Hence the PB translation as *brothers and sisters*.

¹ Unlike an infinitive or a participle, a finite verb can function as the main verb of a sentence (though there are exceptions to this where infinitives and participles can both act as though they were finite verbs).

He threw the ball. **Threw** is a finite verb. While he was walking, he threw the ball. In Greek, threw is still the finite, or main, verb of this sentence. *While he was walking* would typically be expressed by a single participle in Greek. *While he was walking* does not comprise a complete sentence. It needs a clause with a finite verb.

² A transitive verb is a verb that can take a direct object. In Greek, that direct object will be in the accusative case.

³ A transitive verb is a finite verb that can take a direct object, which in Greek is

usually in the accusative case. In the English sentence, *Bob threw the ball*, threw is a transitive verb and the ball is the direct object.

Part of the complexity of understanding participles in Greek is that they can function in many different ways. Trying to sort out which way to translate a participle in a given context is a challenge.

⁴ As a general rule, you can say that Greek sentences all have a finite verb (occasionally a be-verb is implied rather than stated). In the absence of punctuation—which was not invented until several centuries later—the presence of a finite verb was one flag that indicated to the reader that he was into a new sentence.

ἡγαπημένοι ὑπὸ θεοῦ *loved by God*. is, like εἰδότες, a perfect passive participle nominative plural masculine. The context suggests, however, that Paul thinks this participle is connected with ἀδελφοὶ rather than with the *We* of verse 2. He thinks the Thessalonian believers are loved by God and chosen by him.

As with other perfect tense verbs, it suggests completed action in the past which has continuing implications/results in the present. So the Thessalonian believers were loved and chosen by God in the past, and they are *still* loved and chosen by God.

There are indications as the letter unfolds that the Thessalonian believers had suffered significant persecution as a result of having turned to Jesus. Emphasizing how they were loved by God...

...undoubtedly had the effect of assuring the readers that whatever abuse and rejection they experienced at the hands of family, friends, or fellow citizens was worth it because of the standing they had gained with the one true and living God.¹

ὑπὸ is a preposition whose meaning will vary depending on the case of the noun/pronoun that follows it. Here, it is followed by a genitive, and is rendered as *by*. Hence, ἡγαπημένοι ὑπὸ θεοῦ is *loved by God*.

τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν *your chosenness*. ἐκλογὴν is the accusative feminine singular of ἐκλογή (*election, choice*). This is the direct object of εἰδότες.² Paul knows their chosenness. That is, he knows they are among the chosen of God. Divine election is a key theme in Paul's theology.

If Paul had used the genitive case (τῆς ἐκλογῆς ὑμῶν), it would have suggested *knowing of/about your election*. The use of the accusative here emphasizes that Paul is claiming direct, confident knowledge of the Thessalonians' elect status—not just an awareness or suspicion of it. His certainty (εἰδότες) implies that election can be recognized through its effects in the life of believers.

¹ Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 77.

² This is a clue in the context that indicates we were right to translate the participle εἰδότες as though it were a main verb. Paul actually gave this participle a direct object.

How *does* Paul know of their election? This is answered in the previous verse. By:

- their faithful deeds
- their works of love
- the consistency of their confidence in Jesus.

Paul is on the same page as James, who says in 2:8 of his letter, *I will show you my faith by my actions.*

The way Paul brings God's love (ἡγαπημένοι ὑπὸ θεοῦ) and divine election (τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν) together is significant, suggesting a close relationship between these concepts in Paul's thought.

Paul's language here emphasizes God's initiative in salvation. The Thessalonians are loved and chosen by God, not because of their own merit.

While this verse seems to speak of election as corporate, referring to the Thessalonian church as a whole, rather than to individuals, Paul elsewhere speaks of election as a very personal thing (Gal 1:15-16, Rom. 9:10-13). So it would seem that Paul thought of God's-choosing as being both corporate¹ and individual.

1:5

For our good news was not given to you as mere words, but it came with the power of the Holy Spirit...and with our total conviction. You know what kind of people we were when we were with you—it was all for your good.

ὅτι *For*, that is providing an explanation or reason for the sentence or clause that goes before it.

¹ Paul's Jewish background, where the election of Israel as a nation was a key concept, was likely a factor that the Holy

Spirit built on as he inspired Paul in the writing of his letters.

εὐαγγέλιον *good news* is a compound word made up of a prefix **εὖ**— for *good* or *well*¹ and **ἄγγελιον** for *message* or *news*.²

τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν *our good news*. **εὐαγγέλιον** is often translated as *the gospel*. However, as I was rendering this, I thought of the men I play poker with³ and asked myself how many of them would know what *the gospel* referred to. The answer to that question was *none*.

If I think 0% of my readers will understand some aspect of my translation, then that makes it pretty inadequate as a *translation*. I could just as easily leave the phrase in Greek, for all the difference it would make.

Hence, the PB renders **τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν** as *our good news*. Even if people do not know quite what Paul means by this yet, the phrase itself is not meaningless.

You can decide how you want to handle this phrase, based on who the intended audience is for your translation. If yours is to be an in-house translation, for people who have spent the last 30 years going to church, then *our gospel* is a fine rendering. If you can imagine sharing your version with Christians who are new to the faith, or with people from the broader culture who are not yet Believers, then you will need to find another way to handle **τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν**.

οὐκ ἐγενήθη *was not given*. **ἐγενήθη** is a 3rd person aorist passive indicative singular verb from γίνομαι. This verb is used all the time (667 times in the NT) and has a broad lexical range.⁴ In this context, it could be rendered as *came*, or *occurred*. Since it is a passive tense verb, and I could not think of any way to use *was come* smoothly in my translation, I rendered it as *was given*.

The GNT renders this freely as an active-voice verb: *we brought* the Good News to you. The NIV also renders this as an active-voice verb: *our gospel*

¹ **εὐλογέω** to speak well of, to praise;
εὐσωματία good bodily condition, healthy;
εὐτροφία good nutrition

² You will recognize this from the word for angel (**ἄγγελος**—a supernatural messenger from God).

³ We don't play for money. Our main objective is simply to get together to talk.
While women can *go out and talk*, men often need some sort of prop to hold in their hands before they can talk to each

other—whether that prop is a hammer or a deck of cards.

⁴ It gets 3 full pages of small text in the BDAG lexicon.

Bauer, Walter, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), γίνομαι.

came to you. I wanted to retain the character of the passive voice of ἐγενήθη in my translation. Hence, *was given*.

It is your job as a translator to decide how you want to handle this verb after spending time with the BDAG entry on this verb.

While some prepositions can be followed by nouns with various cases, εἰς is invariably followed by an accusative case noun. Hence the ὑμᾶς in εἰς ὑμᾶς to you is in the accusative. εἰς is normally translated with *to* or *toward*. In this context, *to you* works just fine.

Similarly, ἐν is a preposition that is invariably followed by a dative, and is normally rendered along the lines of *in*, *into*, or *with*.

ἐν λόγῳ μόνον *In word only* would be an acceptable translation, but I decided to treat λόγῳ as a collective singular. Hence PB's *in* or *as mere words*.

ἀλλὰ καὶ *but* is an interesting doubling of conjunctions. ἀλλὰ means *but*. καὶ often means *but*, but can be translated as *and* or *even*. NT writers exercised a lot of freedom in how they used conjunctions. The modern translator needs to use his judgment in how to render them.

One thing to keep in mind is that Paul originally wrote this letter in all-uppercase-letters, and used no punctuation or typographical features at all. So sometimes words—such as ἀλλὰ καὶ—are used to add emphasis.

I judged from the context that Paul was using a doubled conjunction to add emphasis and strengthen the contrast. It might cover the same ground as we would if we rendered this with our modern typographic tools as:

*For our good news was not given to you as mere words, but rather with the power of the Holy Spirit....*¹

ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πληροφορίᾳ πολλῇ *with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction*. We have a repeated καὶ here: considered good style in

¹ It would be centuries before anybody thought of using italics or underlining for Greek. And the use of bold-face really

waited on the invention of the printing press.

Paul's day. But in our own day, *We bought apples and oranges and bananas and grapes* is less preferred than *We bought apples, oranges, bananas, and grapes*.¹

I combined these into a phrase *with the power of the Holy Spirit...and with our total conviction*.

With our total conviction is a rendering that is shaped my read of the context of 1 Thessalonians. It would seem that one criticism that Paul was defending himself from was that he was in it for the money, that he was not being genuine or sincere. So I tried to render καὶ πληροφορία πολλῇ in light of that context.

καθὼς οἴδατε οἱοι ἐγενήθημεν ἐν ὑμῖν δι' ὑμᾶς *Even as you know how we lived among you for your sake*. Paul emphasizes his sincerity by reminding people of their first-hand knowledge of him.

ἐν ὑμῖν δι' ὑμᾶς is an interesting phrase. ἐν, followed as we would expect by a dative noun or pronoun (in this case ὑμῖν) we translate as *with* or *among*. δι' is a contracted form of διὰ.

We do much the same thing with *can't*, where we drop out the interior letters of *cannot* and replace them with an apostrophe. In Greek, if the next word begins with a vowel, διὰ drops its final ᾱ, replacing it with an apostrophe. In Greek grammars, this is called *elision*.

Here, διὰ followed by the accusative carries the meaning *for* or *for the sake of*.

ὑμᾶς

Our Ancient texts uses the comma <, > and the period <.> in exactly the same way that we do in English.

The raised-dot at the end of the last word of this verse <'> is a punctuation mark used in Greek texts that indicates what a semi-colon indicates in English: a pause that is stronger than a comma, but weaker than a full stop (i.e. a period).

¹ *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th ed.
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
2017) 6.19, "Serial Commas."

Greek texts indicate a question mark with < ; >. The period, comma, raised-dot, and question mark (i.e. semi-colon) are the only punctuation marks used in Greek texts. They are standard among Classical Greek scholars, such as the editors of the Loeb Classical Library texts from Harvard University Press, as well as biblical scholars, such as the editors of the SBLGNT and the UBS editions of the NT.

Neither the English question < ? > mark nor the exclamation mark < ! > are used in Ancient Greek.

1:6

You became imitators of us and of the Lord. You welcomed the message with the joy of the Holy Spirit, though it came with great persecution.

In chapter 2 of this book, verse 8, Paul opens a window for us on how he went about doing evangelism and discipleship. He says that he, Timothy and Silas had wanted to share with you *not only the Good News of God but even our very own selves*.

Paul's ministry was not just about delivering a message, but about forming genuine relationships and investing personally in the lives of those he served. And having invested in them this way, he was very comfortable having these new believers become imitators both of Jesus, and of he himself and his friends.

Paul is a good model here of how we can (and should!) invest in the lives of younger believers. We should spend the kind of time with them that will allow them to see how Jesus shapes every aspect of our own lives—and then invite them to imitate us as well as Jesus. This is quite different from merely inviting them to watch a DVD by a Christian celebrity of some sort.

Sometimes we older believers can be so acutely conscious of our own failures¹ that it is hard for us to imagine inviting younger believers to imitate us. I have found Paul's words in Romans 12:3 to be a help with this issue.

For by the grace which has been given to me, I tell each of those among you not to be too self-focused—not to spend too much time thinking about yourselves—

¹ In the church I attend, we have a time for confession of our sins in every service.

but rather to think realistically, in keeping with the amount of faith God has given each one of you.

My translation of this verse attempts to unpack the significance of hyper-thinking—ὑπερφρονεῖν (ὑπερ hyper + φρονεῖν to think),¹ a word which brings to the forefront the reality that if you spend too much time thinking about yourself, you never really think seriously about the needs of others.

Not only does ὑπερφρονεῖν impair our efforts to disciple younger believers, but ironically, leaves us less free to relax and be ourselves: to enjoy being the individuals God actually created us to be.

So we can say something like, “Yes, I have lots of places where I need to continue to grow in my following of Jesus. But if I am honest about it, the Holy Spirit *has* been at work in my life, and has brought about some significant change. If I am to speak realistically, I do have something to offer these younger believers. There are some ways in which they *could* imitate me. Now I should get on with life. No point in dwelling on all this.

“I can truly say, as Paul does in 1 Cor. 11:1, *Be imitators of me, just as I am an imitator of Christ.*”

I have been pretty serious about following Jesus for 56 of my 71 years. And after all this time, I still have a problem wrapping my head around the second part of this verse: You welcomed the message with the joy of the Holy Spirit, though it came with great persecution.

Those times of my life where I have actually experienced persecution have never been times that I would describe as *joyful*. I *hate* persecution. I may be

¹ This word is used seldom, if ever, elsewhere in Koine Greek—and used only once in the NT. But it was not a word that Paul coined just to use in this letter. It appears in **Aeschylus**, *The Persians*, line 820 (Loeb 145), **Herodotus**, *Persian Wars*, 1.199 (Loeb 117), **Euripides**, *Hippolytus*, line 1030 (Loeb 484), and **Plato**, *Alcibiades* 1.104A (Loeb 201), and *Phaedrus*, 258b (Loeb 166).

Paul's use of this word in his letter to the Romans is a clue to the high quality of education he received. Of course, Paul did study in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, but

prior to this he was from Tarsus. The Greek geographer Strabo praised Tarsus, stating that it had *surpassed Athens and Alexandria* as an educational center in the Roman Empire (*Geography*, 14.5.13 [Loeb 223]).

Paul is demonstrating a broad vocabulary acquired from a serious exposure to Classical Greek literature, which he calls into service in coaching these Roman believers on how to live their lives before God.

blessed when people say untrue things about me,¹ but whatever *blessed* means it does not mean *joyful*—at least not to me, not so far. This is, however, something of a theme in Paul’s writings. So if I live for another 20 years, perhaps I can yet wrap my head around this NT motif.

To their credit, however, the Thessalonians sorted out the secret to joy in the midst of persecution immediately.

καὶ *And* marks the beginning of the verse. It will be a judgment call on your part as a translator as to whether to render it or not. NET Bible renders it as *And*. NLT and CEV as *So*. The GNT and NIV leave it untranslated.

In English, *and* or *but* typically mark some sort of noteworthy continuity or discontinuity. To a significant extent, **καὶ** in Koine Greek functions as a default narrative connector, not necessarily marking any sort of continuity or discontinuity. For instance, 50% of the verses in the Gospel of Mark begin with **καὶ**.²

Mark’s frequent use of **καὶ** is striking enough that it is considered a distinguishing feature of his writing style.³ That said, even Paul makes greater use of **καὶ** than would be typical in English writing. So while **καὶ** (and other conjunctions such as **δὲ**) are sometimes omitted by translators when the flow of thought is clear without it, there will be other times where you believe the biblical author was particularly emphasizing some sort of continuity or discontinuity.

ὁμεῖς μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε *you became imitators of us* is called an equative nominative (or predicate nominative⁴) structure. **ὁμεῖς** is a nominative plural pronoun, and is the subject of the sentence. **μιμηταὶ** is a noun that is also nominative plural. The two nominatives are connected by a be-verb (**ἐγενήθητε**,

¹ Matthew 5:11

² 339 out of 678 verses.

³ If you see three parallel accounts of the same event in the life of Jesus from each of the Synoptic Gospels, the one with the greatest numbers of **καὶ** beginning verses and connecting ideas is likely Mark’s version of the event.

⁴ The predicate is a word used in traditional Greek teaching to describe the verb, direct object, indirect object, adverbs, and

prepositional phrases—basically everything in the sentence other than the subject of the verb. Normally, we recognize the subject of a sentence in Greek because it is the one noun written in the nominative case. If there is a nominative noun that is not the grammatical subject of the sentence, it is a bit striking and is worthy of its own label, such as equative nominative or predicate nominative.

from γίνομαι). The equative (or predicate) nominative word gives more information about the nominative subject of the sentence.

Although the word *equative* is used, this is not a precise equivalence in the sense of $4 = 2^2$. Rather, the predicate word functions like the word *teacher* in 'Ο ἀνὴρ διδάσκαλος ἐστίν *The man is a teacher*. It gives true information, though not complete. The man IS a teacher, but he is also a husband, a father, etc.

An equative nominative structure includes:

1. A subject in the nominative case
2. A linking verb (often a form of εἶμί, γίνομαι, or ὑπάρχω)
3. A predicate noun or adjective also in the nominative case

Sometimes the structure of the sentence is straightforward, as in John 8:12, ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου *I am the light of the world*. ἐγὼ is a nominative pronoun. εἰμι is a linking be-verb. φῶς is the predicate nominative noun.

Other times, the word order is unpredictable, as in this verse in 1 Thess. ὑμεῖς μιμηταὶ ἐγενήθητε *you are imitators*. Identifying the subject of the sentence, and the predicate nominative, can sometimes be challenging.

There are several principles for figuring out which nominative is the subject and which is the predicate. To explore them, I recommend you purchase Daniel B Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

He has 9 pages of suggestions on how to distinguish the nominative noun or pronoun from the predicate nominative.¹

ἐγενήθητε is an aorist passive verb that I rendered as an active voice, *You became imitators....* So also the GNT, NIV, NLT and CEV.

In truth, this is a difficult verb to render as a passive (*you were being been?*). That said, there may be a nuance that Paul intended by using the emphatically passive voice ἐγενήθητε rather than the middle/passive voice² ἐγένεσθε. Paul

¹ Pp. 40-48. He expands on one nuance of the predicate nominative on pp. 256-270.

² γίνομαι is a verb that lacks a proper active voice form. Rather, it uses a middle voice

with the expectation that we will translate it as though it had an active voice. In Greek textbooks, it is referred to as being a deponent verb.

may have used the strongly passive-voice form of this verb to indicate that the initiative in the Thessalonians becoming imitators of their mentors and of the Lord—this initiative came from God rather than purely from the Thessalonians themselves.

This would be in keeping with an emphasis in many of Paul's letters: that we choose God, yes, but God also chooses us. We choose to imitate Jesus, but Jesus also chooses us to become like him. There is a combined agency here.

A passive voice verb indicates that the action was initiated by somebody other than the nominative-case subject of the sentence. In *Bob threw the ball*, Bob is the subject of the verb *threw*. *The ball was thrown*. In this sentence, ball is the subject of the sentence...but somebody other than the ball actually did the action of throwing.

You will not want to make too much of this in your own teaching. The difference between ἐγενήθητε and ἐγένεσθε is a pretty subtle distinction. It might be wise to keep this little gem to yourself.¹

You might rather decide that seeing a tiny nuance like this is one benefit of learning Greek. It can start trains of thought for you as you do your translation work.

ἡμῶν... καὶ τοῦ κυρίου *of us and the Lord* is a genitive plural and illustrates one very common use of the genitive case in Greek—to express what we would in English by using *of* or *from*. Here, you became imitators *of us* and *of the Lord*.

δεξάμενοι *you welcomed* is a nominative plural participle. When we observe that, we look about in other parts of the sentence for a nominative plural noun or pronoun that this will agree with. ὑμεῖς is the only choice.

Hence, we can say that δεξάμενοι is functioning in an adverbial role, giving more information about ἐγενήθητε *you became*. One possible translation would be *And you became imitators of us and of the Lord by receiving the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit*.

¹ See the section below, Translation Helps > If Only You Could Read This in the Original Greek.

But as we saw at the beginning of 1:4, participles can also function as finite, transitive verbs if the context warrants it. In this case, my translation did assume the use of the participle as a finite, transitive verb: *You welcomed the message....*

As a translator, you can make the judgement call on how you think Paul would have intended his words to be understood, and rendered into another language.

Regardless of how you render δεξάμενοι, **τὸν λόγον** *the message* is a direct object.

It is one of the characteristics of a participle—which shares some of the qualities of both nouns and verbs—that it can take a direct object in the accusative case.

If you have translated ὁ λόγος in John 1:1 as *the Word*, you may wonder how best to render the words τὸν λόγον here. The lexical range for this word is broad enough to encompass a message,¹ an answer to a question,² a written narrative,³ or a prophetic message.⁴ In mathematics texts, it means *ratio*.⁵ Keep the notion of *lexical range* in mind whenever you translate. You are always looking for the sense of a word that the author was intending when he wrote.

ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ *with great persecution* encompasses several features of Koine Greek. First ἐν θλίψει is a prepositional phrase. ἐν is the preposition, which is always followed by a noun in the dative case—here, θλίψει. The most common translations of ἐν are *in* or *with*. Either word could serve in this translation.

πολλῇ is an adjective—which means it gives more information about the noun that it refers to. Since πολλῇ is dative singular, the noun it refers to is also going to be a dative singular. The only available option is θλίψει.

So the message came to the Thessalonians in/with persecution. What else can we say about the persecution? There was LOTS of it—πολλῇ.

¹ As in this verse of 1 Thess.

² 1 Pet. 3:15

³ Acts 1:1

⁴ John 12:38

⁵ *LSJ lexicon*, λόγος, definition II.2.

μετὰ χαρᾶς *with joy* is yet another prepositional phrase. Unlike ἐν, which is invariably followed by a dative noun, μετὰ can be followed by either a genitive or an accusative.

When followed by an accusative, μετὰ is a marker of time, usually translated as *after*, as in Mark 8:31, μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστῆναι *after three days to rise again*.

Here, however, μετὰ is followed by a genitive case noun, where it is typically translated as *among* or *with*. In this verse, *with* fits the context best. They welcomed the message *with joy*.

πνεύματος ἁγίου (*the*) *Holy Spirit*. We encounter that standard use of the genitive in πνεύματος, to express what we do in English with *of*. So they welcomed the message with the joy *of the Spirit*. πνεύματος is a genitive singular noun followed by a genitive singular adjective ἁγίου. Adjectives give more information about the nouns they are connected to. *Which spirit?* we ask. ἁγίου, the *Holy Spirit*.

1:7

As a result you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

ὥστε *As a result* is a conjunction often translated as *so that* or *with the result that*.

γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς *you became* seems like a needlessly complicated construction. It would be perfectly easy to say ὑμεῖς ἐγένεσθε for *You became*.

But just as in English, people enjoy expressing their ideas using different approaches to English vocabulary and grammar, Paul chose to express *You became* using an aorist *infinitive* followed by an *accusative* plural pronoun.

This may not have been an arbitrary decision by Paul. There are indications that this construction was used to express that this was a *result* of something else—namely them having become more like Jesus.

But rather than try to memorize the sorts of scenarios where a writer might use an accusative-subject-with-an-infinitive, best just to recognize that it

happens sometimes, and that the accusative noun or pronoun acts just like it was a nominative, and the infinitive acts like it was a finite verb.¹

In this case, the accusative pronoun acts *as though* it was a nominative pronoun, and the infinitive acts *as though* it was a finite verb. Hence, γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς gets rendered as *You became*.

τύπον *an example*. In cases where there is a second accusative noun following an infinitive, as here with **τύπον**, the second accusative noun is treated as the direct object of the infinitive. ὥστε γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς **τύπον** As a result you became an example....

πᾶσιν *to all* is dative—which is the standard way of expressing the indirect object of the verb. You became what? An example (direct object). To whom? To everybody (**πᾶσιν** indirect object).

τοῖς πιστεύουσιν *the believers*. πιστεύουσιν is a dative plural participle from πιστεύω. It is dative because it agrees with **πᾶσιν**, which is dative.

Because the participle has an article—which has the seemingly magical ability to change almost any kind of Greek word into a noun—it becomes *those who believe*, or *the believers*.

Paul *may* have intended the present tense of the participle emphasizes ongoing faith rather than a single act of believing.

ἐν *in* is a preposition which is always followed by a dative. Hence...

Μακεδονία *Macedonia* and **Ἀχαΐα** *Achaia* are both dative-case nouns. Names of countries, regions, and cities in Greek can appear with or without the article without significantly changing the meaning.

Macedonia encompassed northern Greece, while Achaia included the southern regions, encompassing Athens, Corinth, and Sparta.²

¹ Of course, if you decide to start composing Greek, or maybe producing a translation from English into Koine Greek called 'Ο Χόββιτ, then you will need to work harder on this area. Andrew Wilson did this when

he translated Ἀρείος Ποτήρ καὶ ἡ τοῦ φιλοσόφου λίθος.

² Polybius, *The Histories, Volume VI: Books 28-39. Fragments*, Edited and translated by S. Douglas Olson and W. R. Paton. Revised by F. W. Walbank and Christian Habicht. Loeb

Classical Library 161 (Cambridge, MA:
Harvard University Press, 2012), 38.10,
and...
Pausanias, *Description of Greece*,
Volume III: Books 6-8.21, Translated by W. H.

S. Jones. Loeb Classical Library 272
(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,
1933), 7.16.7-8.

1:8

For not only has the word of the Lord been sounded forth in Macedonia and Achaia from you, but the story of your faith in God has spread everywhere, such that we don't need to say anything further about it.

One of the benefits of reading Greek for me is that it slows me down and encourages me to *think* about what is in the text.¹ It can help to rescue Scripture from the obscurity of familiarity.

An example of this is in 1 Thessalonians 1. I am certain I have read this chapter some dozens of times over the past 50 years, but it wasn't until the last couple of weeks as I reviewed the it in Greek that I said, "Wait! Macedonia plus Achaia comprise *all* of Greece. How on earth did the Good News about Jesus echo forth from Thessalonica all over Greece—and beyond—in just the few months that passed between the establishment of the church by Paul and the writing of this letter?"

One possibility is that they engaged in what we would recognize today as intentional, supported missions work. It is, however, hard for me to visualize them being so very prosperous as what was probably a small congregation that they could have the kind of impact Paul describes in the time frame that is implied.

The other possibility is that they followed the example set by Paul himself of having their business activities integrated with their evangelism²—that they were *merchant missionaries*.

¹ When we downsized our household last year, I threw away a thousand kilograms of books—among which was a commentary by J.F.A. Hort (of Westcott and Hort fame) where he said in the preface that as soon as the boys he was instructing got a basic handle on Classical Greek, he started them reading in the Greek NT. This was because, he said (or so I recall), it rescued the text, which they already knew in the English Bible, from the obscurity of familiarity.

I cannot track down this quote now, and I threw away the book that contained it. But Hort's comment made a powerful impression on me, as it described my own experience so completely.

As an aside, I was left wondering how old *the boys* were when they started their Greek studies.

² Acts 18:3; 20:33-34.

While the New Testament has little reference to this missionary model being followed by other believers,¹ we know that it took a serious hold in regions east of the old Roman Empire.

At Pentecost, among the new converts were Babylonian and Persian Jews.² As they returned home with their new faith, it took root in Persia and further east. We do not often think of these people as being a part of the early church, as our knowledge of church history typically stops at the eastern border of the Roman Empire.

But by the second century, the majority of people in what is today Uzbekistan had become passionate followers of Jesus, and in their work as traders along the Silk Road began planting churches from Central Asia all the way out to the coast of China.³

The Persian merchant did not conceive of his business as a facade for his missionary activity. His livelihood depended upon his business and not upon his evangelistic ministry.

Indeed, in Syriac, the word for merchant, ܬܝܓܪܐ (tagara), was often used as a synonym for a Central Asian⁴ missionary. A fourth century Syriac Christian hymn included the following stanza:

Travel well girt like merchants,
That we may gain the world.
Convert men to me,
Fill creation with teaching.⁵

¹ In Acts 18:2-3, Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned as tentmakers who worked alongside Paul in Corinth. While the text does not explicitly state that they used this trade to support their missionary work, their collaboration with Paul in both tentmaking and ministry suggests they may have followed a similar model of self-support.

² Acts 2:9 There were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and people who live in Mesopotamia.... This would include what we today think of as Iraq and Iran. The Parthian Empire also included today's

Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan.

³ There is no room here to unpack what we know of the Church of the East, but you can get some clues to start with from <https://www.perplexity.ai/search/what-evidence-is-there-that-ch-1nGhqr.8RRub3HPqH3FBxQ#0>.

⁴ The church in Samarkand, in modern Uzbekistan, was a major missionary sending-church.

⁵ Richard C. Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 62.

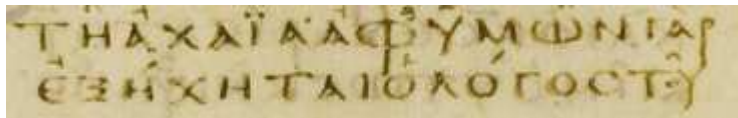
In much the same way that we contract *cannot* into *can't*, Greek contracted ἀπὸ ὑμῶν into ἀφ' ὑμῶν *from you*. ἀπὸ is a preposition that is always followed by a genitive noun or pronoun—here, the plural pronoun *you*.

Normally, γάρ *For* is a conjunction that always appears as the *second* word in a clause or sentence. In this instance, it appears as the third word.

We today think of ἀφ' ὑμῶν as a *two-word prepositional phrase*. It would seem that the Apostle Paul thought of it rather like a single word.

Paul wrote his letter in all-uppercase-letters, with no spaces between letters. Hence, it would be easy for him to take what we think of as a two-word phrase and think of it himself as a single syntactic unit.

Codex Vaticanus was made sometime between A.D. 325 and 350, but used a similar all-upper-case format to Paul's original. As we look at this codex, it is easy to see how running the words together could make it easy for Paul to think of a two-word phrase as a single unit.



1 Thess. 1:8 from Codex Vaticanus¹

It will be easier to read if I mark the words for you.



SBLGNT

ἀφ' ὑμῶν γὰρ
ἐξήχεται ὁ λόγος

All Upper Case

ΑΦ' ΥΜΩΝ ΓΑΡ

¹ https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1209#.

ΕΞΗΧΗΤΑΙ Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ

With Sigma Written as C instead of Σ:¹

ΑΦ' ΥΜΩΝ ΓΑΡ

ΕΞΗΧΗΤΑΙ Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ

No Spaces

ΑΦ'ΥΜΩΝΓΑΡ

ΕΞΗΧΗΤΑΙΟΛΟΓΟΣ

ἐξήχεται *to sound forth* is a perfect passive indicative from ἐξηχέω *to ring out*. The most common reason for using the perfect tense in Koine Greek is that the author wanted to indicate that something happened in the past...but the implications of that happening were still being played or in the present.

So, the Good News had gone out from Thessalonica all over Greece, and seemingly to other parts of the Aegean Basin, and the impact of their witness was still going on.

λόγος *message* is nominative singular for *word* or *message*. Paul used the nominative case as a way to indicate that he intended this word to be the subject of the sentence. The message has been going out.

Had Paul used an active voice in the verb, he would have probably expressed this along the lines of *For you have sounded forth the word of the Lord*.

When a passive voice verb is used, as in *the word of the Lord has been sounded forth*, it indicates that the subject of the sentence (ὁ λόγος) is the *recipient* of the verb's action rather than the *performer* of the action.

Τοῦ κυρίου *of the Lord*. The most common use of genitive is to express the English *of* or *from*.

We see stylistic differences in Paul's writing between verse 7 and here in verse 8. In 1:7 he uses the phrase ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ. In this verse he

¹ The form of the sigma written in Athens in 450 BC was "Σ". However, around the time of Alexander the Great, there was a transition to writing the sigma as "C". Our

modern Greek New Testaments have reverted back to the earlier, Classical-Greek form for the sigma.

only uses the preposition once, and it governs both nouns: **ἐν** τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ **καὶ** Ἀχαΐᾳ.

Both constructions are perfectly acceptable Greek. The meaning is the same in both cases. We tend to vary the construction of written English to avoid monotony, and to make the text more engaging. It is entirely possible that Paul was doing this same thing in Greek.

Regardless of whether he uses **ἐν** only once or repeatedly, it is always followed by dative noun(s). We see the same use of the dative with **ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ** *in every place*, where both the noun τόπῳ, place, and the adjective that modifies it παντὶ, every, are dative.

ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν ἢ πρὸς τὸν θεόν *your faith in God*. This phrase highlights an interesting construction that is common in Greek.

In English, we already put an adjective before the noun it modifies. *The red book is on the table*. Book is the noun that is the subject of the verb. Red is the adjective that gives us more information about the book.

In Greek, however, it is possible to say *The ball the red (one)* rather than *the red ball*. And so here. The article ἡ turns *the entire phrase* πρὸς τὸν θεόν into an adjective that modifies the noun πίστις. What kind of faith is it? Faith directed toward God—God-centered faith. To get this into smooth English, virtually every published version translates this as *your faith in God*.

The NT uses **θεός** and **ὁ θεός** interchangeably. Given the context of the NT and the rest of the Bible, that there is only one true God, we translate **ὁ θεός** in this verse as *God* and not *the god*.

ἐξελήλυθεν *to go out* is another perfect tense. It indicates that the good news has gone out, and it is still having an impact.

In verse 7 we saw the accusative-subject-with-infinitive construction following the word **ὥστε** *as a result*, and we see it again in this verse.¹ **ὥστε** *as a result* **ἔχειν ἡμᾶς** *we have* **μὴ χρειᾶν** *no need*.

¹ Now that we have seen this twice, you can file this away in your mind as a pattern to be on the lookout for: that result clauses may be one place where we will observe

the Accusative-Subject-with-Infinitive structure.

The accusative immediately following the infinitive is the subject of the verb, while the additional accusative *χρείαν need* is the direct object.

In the accusative-subject-with-infinitive structure, the infinitive acts like a regular, main verb, and the accusative that follows acts like a nominative subject of the verb.

Where there is a second accusative, it acts like a direct object. So *need*, or actually *μὴ χρειάν no need*, is the object of the verb.

1:9

For these others themselves tell about what a great reception we had when we visited with you, and how you turned to God from idols...to serve the true and living God,

While Paul started his preaching in the Thessalonian synagogue, it is clear that many of the converts had been pagan idol-worshippers. This gives us the feeling that more is left unsaid than said in Luke's account of the founding of this church in Acts.

Grammatically, verses 9 and 10 go together, with two parallel infinitives dependent on the same main verb. The main verb in this passage is *ἐπεστρέψατε*, meaning *you turned*.

The two infinitives are:

- δουλεύειν — *to serve*
- ἀναμένειν — *to wait for*

These infinitives are functioning as infinitives of purpose. That is, they express the *purpose* or *result* of the main action (turning to God): serving and waiting.

Look to the *Translation Helps* chapter in this book > *Greek Infinitives* for a general discussion of the uses of infinitives.

ἀπαγγέλλουσιν *they tell* is 3rd person plural form of ἀπαγγέλλω. That means the rendering of *they tell* is already packaged in the verb. Adding **αὐτοὶ** *themselves*, the nominative masculine plural form of αὐτός, could mean simply *them* when used as a personal pronoun in any case except the nominative. However, the nominative αὐτοὶ is often rendered as *themselves*. Since the subject they is already implied in the main verb, Paul was using the word to add emphasis.

It is not uncommon for commentators to say that αὐτοὶ is *fronted* (out ahead of the verb), and the word order was intended to add emphasis to the sentence, as in *For they themselves...*

I am never entirely sure about arguments from word order in NT Greek, as the NT writers seem to exercise such enormous flexibility in their writing.

If Paul had a default word order of verb-subject-object, then the notion of fronting would make good sense. But Paul seems to use subject-verb-object just about as frequently.

Regardless, it is your job as a translator, looking at the context, to determine whether to render this verse as *They tell*¹ or *They themselves tell*.²

Once again we see there conjunction γὰρ *For* in its accustomed place as the second word in the sentence.

περί *concerning* can be followed by either a genitive noun or an accusative. Where followed by a genitive, as here, it means *about/concerning*.

So Paul and his colleagues were hearing from other people in Greece and elsewhere about how they themselves had been welcomed by the Thessalonians, and how the Thessalonians had turned from paganism to Jesus.

One certainly gets the impression that a) the Christian movement was growing rapidly, and b) there was an enormous amount of travel back and forth along the Greek coast, and also around the whole Aegean Basin. Being in Corinth, Paul was ideally positioned to keep his finger on the pulse of the growth of the church in the Aegean Basin.

Strabo, writing in the early first century, said:

The Isthmus of Corinth connects the Peloponnese with the mainland. Across this isthmus has been built a paved road called the Diolkos, over which ships are drawn from one sea to the other.³

He went on to say:

¹ E.g., GNT, NLT

² E.g., NIV

³ *Geography*, 8.2.1 (Loeb 196)

Corinth is called *wealthy* because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbors, of which the one leads straight to Asia, and the other to Italy; and it makes easy the exchange of merchandise from both countries that are so far distant from each other.¹

Dragging ships across the Diolkos allowed ships to avoid the dangerous circumnavigation of the Peloponnese.² Beyond this, Corinth lay astride the overland movement of goods between northern and southern Greece.

This location made it a crucial hub for land and sea trade routes, and an ideal location for Paul to keep his finger on the pulse of church growth in the Aegean Basin.

εἴσοδον *entrance* is accusative—the direct object of the verb *to report*. *What* was reported to Paul? The *welcome*.

ὅποιαν *of what sort?* is normally considered an interrogative pronoun. This sentence is not a query, of course. But there is an implied indirect question, which serves as the content of what is being reported. If we were to phrase this as a direct question, it would be:

ὅποιαν εἴσοδον ἔσχετε; *So...what kind of reception did you have?*

We will see another interrogative pronoun, *πῶς* *how?* used later in this same verse.

The use of **ὅποιαν** here demonstrates the flexibility of Greek syntax in reported speech and indirect questions. It allowed Paul to embed the essence of a

¹ Ibid., 8.6.20

² Inspection of a map of Greece will show that sailing around the south coast of the Peloponnese not only added a good bit of distance to a trip, but there are several capes that must be rounded. In particular, Cape Maleas has always been notoriously treacherous and difficult to navigate, due in no small part to the cliffs that channel and accelerate the wind.

It was here, in Homer's tale, that Ulysses was blown off course, not to return home for another 10 years. *But Zeus, the Cloud-Gatherer, stirred the north wind against*

our ships, in a blinding tempest, hiding the land and sea alike in cloud, while darkness swept from the sky. Headlong the ships were driven, sails torn to shreds by the force of the gale. In terror of death we lowered the masts on deck.... I would have reached home safely, but as I was rounding Cape Maleas, the north wind and waves and the ocean currents beat me away, off course, past Cythera. Homer, *Iliad*, Book 9, lines 66-81 (Loeb 104).

Many ship owners elected to pay the fees to have their vessels hauled across the Diolkos at Corinth rather than risk a transit of Cape Maleas.

question within a declarative statement, maintaining an interrogative nuance without forming a direct question.

Probably, Paul intended this as a way to add vividness to the narrative, as it indirectly presents the question that might be on people's minds about the nature of his reception among the Thessalonians.

ἔσχομεν **πρὸς** ὑμᾶς *we had from you*. **πρὸς** plus an accusative is normally rendered as *to* or *toward*. However, that translation would make no sense in this context. But we do see in the LSJ, definition A, that **πρὸς** was sometimes used by Greek authors with the sense of the English word, *from*. That does make sense here. *We have heard from others about the welcome we had from you.*

πῶς *how* is a second use of an interrogative *How?* in a declarative sentence. *We have heard how you turned toward God from idols.*

ἄπο *from* is a preposition that is followed by a genitive noun, as here.

This verse illustrates the difference between the English article (almost always translated as *the*) and the Greek article. In this verse, the article is attached to both θεὸν and εἰδώλων, and in both cases we leave it untranslated in English.

How to handle the Greek article is determined by the context. Looking at how published English translations have handled a given verse can be a tip off as to how other translators have understood the article that is puzzling you.¹

δουλεῦν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ *to serve the true and living God*. We would expect the word for God to be in the accusative case, along with the adjectives living and true, which help describe and define God.

Being adjectives, ζῶντι and ἀληθινῷ agree with θεῷ in case, gender, and number. This agreement helps Paul to make very clear just which noun Paul intends for us to attach these adjectival qualities to.

However, δουλεῦν is a verb which—as the context here makes plain—takes a dative case noun as the direct object.

¹ For instance, go to <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage>

[/?search=1 Thess. 1:3&version=NIV;GNT;NLT;CEV](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thess.1:3&version=NIV;GNT;NLT;CEV).

You can confirm that this is a pattern of usage by reviewing other instances of this verb in the NT.

- Col. 3:24 τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε. *Serve the Lord Christ* (imperative verb form in this verse).
- Romans 7.25. δουλεύω νόμῳ θεοῦ *I serve the law of God.*

1:10

and wait for his son to come from heaven, whom he raised from the dead: Jesus who delivered us from the wrath that is to come.

Acts 1:11 makes clear that the return of Jesus was a core component of the Faith from the very beginning.

(The angels) said, "Men of Galilee. Why are you standing there looking up into the heavens?"¹ This Jesus — the same one who has been taken away from you up into heaven — will come back the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

We have had a pendulum swinging over the past 50 years in terms of our interest in the return of Jesus. In the 1970s and 1980s, the lunatic fringe of Christianity—at least in North America—was focused on things like:

- The growth in the number of vultures in Israel in the 1970s, which was said to point to the immediacy of the Battle or Armageddon—since the carrion birds were to come and clean up after the battle.²

¹ Really? Really?? My sympathies are with the apostles here in their shock and surprise. This is not something you see every day. It is a bit of a big deal.

It would have made sense to me if the angels had said, "This being taken up into the sky and into the clouds is striking, yes. But the REAL special event is not happening now, but when Jesus returns. Now THAT will be worth looking up for!"

² Back in the middle of the 1970s, there was a tract that got lots of circulation, called *Why all the buzzards?* My pastor would make sure that there was a good supply of

these tracts in the foyer of the church.

I and a friend of mine, who were horrified by the lunacy of this tract, kept taking them all away to discard them. The pastor, who was doubtless encouraged that so many people in the congregation were reading this tract, kept resupplying them. We kept taking them away. This went on for many months.

It will not surprise you that, since Jesus has not returned some 50 years after the tract was published, that it is out of print and copies cannot be located.

- The beginning of the millennium, commencing no later than 50 years after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. That is, by 1988.
- Saddam Hussein as the anti-Christ.

If indeed there ever was an increase in the number of buzzards,¹ that was an indication of an improvement in the health of the middle east ecosystem, not an indicator that Armageddon would happen prior to 1980.

Further, 1989 arrived without the bodily return of Jesus to gather his people. And all the books about Saddam Hussein as the anti-Christ needed to be rewritten after Saddam got his butt kicked in Gulf War 1.

Collectively, this led to a level of embarrassment in the Christian community around everything having to do with the return of Jesus. We tended to shift to a *What has God done for me lately?* emphasis.

But Paul reminds us in this letter that, whether a lunatic fringe exists or not, looking forward to the return of Jesus is a key component of our faith.

There are no major translation issues in this verse. It follows on from verse 9. *You turned from idols to serve the true and living God...*

καὶ ἀναμένειν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν and *to wait for his son (to come) from heaven.*

Although we have seen the Accusative-Subject-with-Infinitive structure twice already in this chapter, that is something that occurs only in specific circumstances. In this chapter, both times it was in a result clause after the word ὥστε.

In most other cases, infinitives take an accusative case noun as a direct object, just the same as a finite verb² would do. Here, the direct object of ἀναμένειν is τὸν υἱὸν. Who are they waiting for? The Son. The genitive αὐτοῦ is performing

¹ The only citation that the tract used to support its assertion was something along the lines of *Rabbi Slobovnik tells us there are more buzzards now than last year.*

² A finite verb is what I have been calling a *main verb*. It is a verb form that has a subject and has a suffix that indicates person and number, making it clear who or what is performing the action.

a key function of the genitive case—to indicate possession. To whom does the Son belong? To *him* i.e., to God.

ἐκ *from* is invariably followed by a genitive, and so it is here.

τῶν οὐρανῶν *the heavens* is interesting. It is a plural word form, but most published English translations render it as a singular.¹

Heaven occurs both as a plural and also as a singular in the New Testament. For instance, in Mark 13:32, the singular is used: Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ἢ τῆς ὥρας οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι ἐν οὐρανῷ.... *But no one knows the day or the hour when this will happen, neither the angels in heaven....*

In this verse, the plural is used. Our instinct is to look for patterns of use in the singular and plural, but these forms seem to be interchangeable as far as NT authors were concerned. It is your job as a translator to decide whether the context you are translating from best suits rendering this word-group as a singular or as a plural.²

ὃν ἤγειρεν ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν *whom he raised from the dead* is a relative clause, introduced by ὃν, a relative pronoun. A relative clause gives more information about the noun that the pronoun agrees with. ὃν is accusative singular, as is τὸν υἱόν. So we get more information about the Son, Jesus, here, namely that God raised him from the dead.

τῶν νεκρῶν is, like τῶν οὐρανῶν in this verse, another instance of a plural where we might expect a singular. Paul often uses the plural form of the word νεκρός in speaking of the resurrection of Jesus, or of God's people.

Ἰησοῦν *Jesus* is an accusative singular, which brings it into agreement with τὸν υἱόν and ὃν in this verse. So everything in this verse is about Jesus.

τὸν ρύόμενον *the one who rescued* is an accusative preposition, with an accusative article. Again, this agrees with all the other accusative components of this verse, indicating that we are getting more information about Jesus.

The verb ρύομαι means *to rescue*. When preceded by an article, the preposition gets turned into a verbal-noun or a verbal-adjective: *the one who rescues*. But it

¹ This is so with all of the GNT, NLT, CEV, NIV and Phillips.

² See the NIV in Heb. 1:10.

retains enough of its verb-quality that it can accept a direct object **ἡμᾶς** *us*. So who does Jesus rescue? He rescues *us*.

As with the other two instances in this verse, **ἐκ** is rendered as *from*, and is followed by a genitive noun, **τῆς ὀργῆς** *the wrath*. So Jesus rescues us from *the wrath*.

Immediately following **τῆς ὀργῆς**, we have **τῆς ἐρχομένης** *the coming*, a genitive article followed by a genitive participle. This agreement in number, gender and case with **τῆς ὀργῆς** indicates that the participle is a verbal-adjective that gives more information about *the wrath*. This is *the coming wrath*, or *the wrath that is to come*.

Paul has made no reference to *the coming wrath* prior to this in 1 Thessalonians. However, if indeed Paul had a copy of Matthew's gospel at his elbow as he wrote, there were plenty of things Jesus had to say about the coming of eternal life for those on his side, and eternal punishment for those who are against him.

Still, *the coming wrath*...

Like the return of Jesus, this piece of verse 10 does not easily find a place in the feel-good, self-help sermons so popular in in the 2020s in Canada, particularly in large churches.

...is something that we should tuck into the back of our minds, to be particularly alert to as we read the rest of this letter—and later, as we read the rest of Paul's letters.

Chapter 2

2:1

For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not wasted.

Paul is saying, in effect, *Not only do other people talk about the results of our visit, but you yourselves know that it was not a failure.*¹

Αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἶδατε *You yourselves know.* αὐτοὶ is likely intended, as it was in 1:9, to make the *you know* more emphatic: *You yourselves know.*²

Once again, γὰρ *for* is in its accustomed place, as the second word in the phrase.

οἶδατε *you know* is a verb with a perfect-tense word form. However, the NIV, NLT, GNT, and CEV all render this with an English present tense, *you know*.

οἶδα is an odd verb, which has only perfect word forms, but almost invariably carries with it a present-tense meaning. This is most likely because if you knew something yesterday, you still know it today.

Verbs that lack expected word forms are called *defective verbs*. Common defective verbs in the NT include:

- οἶδα *I know*. Only perfect-system forms. Functions with present meaning.³

¹ Eugene Albert Nida and Paul Ellingworth, *A Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), 19.

² Look back to the discussion of 1:9 for more on the default word order of Paul's sentences.

³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 579-580.

- δεῖ *it is necessary*. Impersonal verb. Only occurs in 3rd person singular forms.
- εἰμί *I am*. No perfect or aorist forms exist.

As discussed in 1:4, unless there are clear contextual indications that only men are included, ἀδελφοί is best rendered as *brothers and sisters*. This is not unlike the word ἄνθρωποι, which refers to *people* generally, both male and female. Where males are specifically being referred to, the word used most often is ἀνὴρ *man* (plural: ἄνδρες).

STEPBible tags this word as being in the *vocative case*, because Paul is *directly addressing people*, and calling them by name. Imagine translating these sentences into Greek.

- *Bob, you must throw the ball.* In this case, the speaker is addressing Bob directly, and so the name Bob would be formed as a vocative.¹
- *Bob threw the ball.* The speaker is here describing what Bob did, not speaking directly to Bob. The name *Bob*, as the grammatical subject of the verb, would be formed as a nominative case noun.

τὴν εἰσοδὸν ἡμῶν τὴν πρὸς ὑμᾶς *the coming of us to you*. This is the exact same structure that we saw Paul using in 1:8—article-noun-article-adjective, with a possessive *your* inserted after the noun. There, the adjective was actually a prepositional phrase where the article turned the whole phrase into the adjective—*your God-centered faith* (which I rendered as *your faith in God*).

Here we have *the coming of us, the (one) to you*. One will render this into proper English as *our coming to you*, or *our visit with you*.

ὅτι *that* is placed in a spot that seems a little odd to us. It feels like it should immediately follow ἀδελφοί—*For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming....*

It could be that Paul was trying to add emphasis to the words τὴν εἰσοδὸν ἡμῶν τὴν πρὸς ὑμᾶς by fronting them ahead of ὅτι. We know that in this pre-punctuation/typography age in which Paul wrote, words that we would

¹ Some names have different forms between nominative and vocative. Other names use identical word-formation, and it is the

Greek NT editor's judgement on how to tag the word.

emphasize with *italics*, **bold**, or underline got highlighted by means of vocabulary-choice and word order.

It is also possible that Paul's writing here was mirroring his spoken speech, complete with natural pauses. Paul may have introduced some stylistic variation in the hopes it would make his writing more engaging for the original readers.¹

οὐ κενὴ γέγονεν *has not been wasted* is an equative nominative phrase. γέγονεν is a be-verb, from γίνομαι. The subject of γέγονεν, almost certainly *it*, is not explicitly stated in this clause. In Greek, the subject can often be implied rather than explicitly stated.

κενὴ is a noun in the nominative case. (*It*) *was not wasted*.

γέγονεν is a perfect tense verb, which indicates that it is describing action that took place in the past which has implications still being felt in the present. It is often difficult to express this nuance in our translations. The NIV, NLT, GNT, and CEV all translate this as though it was a simple past tense (*our coming was not wasted*). You may, if you wish, translate it using an English perfect tense—*our coming to you has not failed*.

But you are already coming to notice a pattern that *verb tense in Greek* is not exactly the same as *verb tense in English*.

In English, French, Spanish, and German, the primary function of verb tense is to indicate when an action takes place relative to the time of speaking (past, present, or future).

In Greek, while time plays a role in the verb forms used by an author, verb tenses have a lot to do with the way the author *thought* about the action. The time of action, past, present or future, was often dealt with by other indications in the context (e.g., *After three days, Later, Soon*).

¹ Part of what we love about Winston Churchill was his ability to express sentiments in a way that was engaging and memorable. *Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few*

(speech delivered to the House of Commons on August 20, 1940, in reference to the Battle of Britain).

We will sort out how Paul used Greek verb tenses as we continue through this letter.

2:2

Even though we had earlier suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know. Yet our God gave us the courage to boldly tell to you the Good News about him in spite of all the opposition.

Suetonius's *Life of Claudius* (*Divus Claudius*), chapter 25, section 4 opens with:

Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.

While it is possible that Chrestus was some Jewish individual, it is also possible that Suetonius misheard the name 'Christus' (referring to Jesus as Christ) as 'Chrestus'¹ and failed to understand that the disturbances were related to Christian activity. If the latter possibility is true, it would indicate that Christians had made significant inroads in the empire, reaching into Rome itself, in just the 20 years since the crucifixion.² It would also help us understand why officials in Philippi and Thessalonica would be so quick to act against Paul and other Christians.

Acts 18:2 refers to this expulsion from Rome as having been the reason for Priscilla and Aquilla relocating to Corinth from Rome.

ἀλλὰ but brings to us an interesting translation challenge.

There are several Greek words for which there is no natural English equivalent, and which in consequence are often left untranslated. These include μέν, ἰδοὺ, τε, and ἄν. While καί is frequently translated as *and*, it is the case that half of the verses in the Gospel of Mark begin with καί. So when translating Mark, to maintain readability in English, καί is often left untranslated.

The issue in this verse is that ἀλλὰ is typically perceived as an emphatic *but*, used to introduce a strong, distinct contrast. It is not normally left untranslated.

¹ James D.G. Dunn, *Christianity in the Making*, vol 2: *Beginning from Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 335

² In any case, it is true that a decade later, in Acts 28:15, there were definitely Christians in Rome.

However, Paul does not appear to be contrasting anything in this verse with the previous verse. He is advancing the narrative, but not really contrasting verse 2 with verse 1. Consequently, the NIV, GNT, CEV, NLT and Phillips all leave the word untranslated.

The ESV and NASB go ahead and translate ἀλλὰ as *But*, even though it does not point to any particular contrasting idea. You will need to read these verses carefully, and make your own decision as to how to render this.

προπαθόντες καὶ ὑβρισθέντες *having suffered and been mistreated*. The context suggests that Paul intended these participles to have a concessive force.

Concessive is Greek-grammar jargon for the idea of conceding or admitting something, despite it being contrary to the main point. In the context of translating the NT, a concessive clause or phrase expresses an idea that contrasts with or seems to contradict the main clause, but doesn't prevent the main clause from being true. In English, we often use words like *although*, *even though*, or *despite* to express this.

Hence the PB rendering of *Even though we had earlier suffered and been mistreated....*

καθὼς οἶδατε *as you know* is a parenthetical comment which interrupts the main flow of the sentence. As discussed in 2:1, οἶδα is a word with perfect-tense suffixes that lacks a proper set of present-tense endings, and is almost always translated as though it were present tense.¹

ἐν Φιλίπποις *in Philippi*. ἐν is a preposition that is invariably followed by a noun in the dative case, so it is no surprise to find Φιλίπποις is a dative case noun.

What is a bit curious is that Φίλιπποι always appears as a plural form, even though it is the name of a single city. This linguistic feature is not uncommon in ancient place names— Ἀθῆναι (*Athens*) and Θῆβαι (*Thebes*)—and doesn't imply that there were multiple cities called Philippi.

ἐπαρρησιασάμεθα *We spoke boldly* is the main verb, describing action that took place after that of the participles: *We had earlier suffered and been mistreated*.

¹ This could be due, at least in part, to the fact that knowing is not an action that can be contained in the past. If you ran yesterday, you are not necessarily running

right now. But if you knew something yesterday, you still know it today.

For Greek participles, tense tells us about the timing of action *relative to the main verb* of the sentence. Aorist participles such as we see in this verse often indicate action occurring *prior* to the main verb.

ἐν τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν *in our God* is yet another prepositional phrase, with ἐν followed by a dative noun θεῷ.

In the NT, sometimes the word for *God* is preceded by an article that agrees with it in case, as here.¹ Other times the article is missing. It is difficult for us in the 21st century to find any pattern in the inclusion or omission of the article before the name *God*.

ἡμῶν is a genitive plural for *us/we*. One of the primary uses of the genitive is to expression possession. So in this phrase, τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν, the ἡμῶν is communicating that the one who helped Paul and his companions was *our God*.

The phrase ἐν τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν is an important one.

The work of the Holy Spirit in Paul's life is evident to us—as it was to the Thessalonians—in that he was bold in spite of dreadful experiences in Philippi. The most natural thing in the world would have been for him to say, *Given the mistreatment we experienced in Philippi, we were a good deal more cautious and subdued by the time we got to you*. No, God gave them boldness.

λαλῆσαι *to speak* is a complementary infinitive— that is, it completes the meaning of the main verb παρρησιάζομαι. Had Paul used an aorist indicative for speaking, it would have meant something like: *We had boldness and spoke....* With the infinitive, there is a tighter connection between the boldness and the speaking: *We had boldness to speak....*

Of course, παρρησιάζομαι has the idea of speaking built into it. However, definition ② in BDAG for this word says *When used with the infinitive (as in 1 Th 2:2) παρρησιάζομαι gains the sense have the courage, venture*. That is to say, the apparent redundancy appears to add a bit more emphasis to what Paul expressed in this verse.

¹ θεῷ is dative singular masculine. The article τῷ is also dative singular masculine.

λαλῆσαι is an aorist infinitive. Had Paul used a present infinitive, it would have emphasized ongoing, or repeated action, possibly suggesting continuous proclamation, even after leaving Thessalonica. However, given that it is aorist, it views the action as complete, or whole, and is likely indicating that Paul was thinking of his time in Thessalonica, which is now complete.¹

πρὸς ὑμᾶς *to you*. **πρὸς** is a preposition whose meaning changes slightly depending on the case of the noun, or pronoun, that follows it. In this case, ὑμᾶς is accusative, so **πρὸς ὑμᾶς** is commonly translated as *to you*.

In The PB version, the *to* is understood to be a bit redundant, so for the sake of good English style, the phrase is translated *God gave us the courage to boldly tell you the Good News*.

τὸ εὐαγγέλιον *the Good News* is a term whose translation is discussed in 1:5. It is here in the accusative case, since it is the direct object of the infinitive λαλῆσαι. *What did God give them courage to speak of? The Good News*.

τοῦ θεοῦ *of God* makes use of one of the key functions of the genitive case, namely to express the same thing we do by *of* or *from* in English. So they spoke about the Good News *of* or *about* God.

ἐν πολλῷ ἀγῶνι *with much opposition* is yet another instance where ἐν is followed by a dative noun, ἀγῶνι, together with an adjective πολλῷ, which agrees with its noun in gender, case, and number.

This phrase is most naturally rendered as *in much struggle*, or *with much opposition*. Given the context of this verse, starting out with the participles *Even though we had earlier suffered and been mistreated*, and Paul's sense that they had required God-given courage, I rendered ἐν πολλῷ ἀγῶνι as *in spite of much opposition*.

2:3

Our exhortation to you is not rooted in error or impurity or in deceit.

¹ See the chapter in this book called Translation Helps> Greenwood and the

Aorist Tense. It has a discussion of the aspect of the aorist tense.

The 21st century suspicion that evangelists and pastors may be *in it for the money*¹ is not a new one. It goes right back to A.D. 50.

I learn from a Malayali nurse² that in the South India Pentecostal community, when your church pastor comes to pray with you in your home, it is customary to give him a cash tip that is roughly equivalent to 5% of your monthly income. This, together with other similar practices, means that church pastors often live in homes whose opulence is difficult to match in Canada.

It may be that such pastors are totally sincere, and have only serving Jesus as their priority—but their lifestyles inevitably raise questions as to whether this is so or not.

Paul wanted to nip these suspicions in the bud.

γὰρ *For* is in its accustomed place as the second word of the sentence. NIV translates this as *for*. However, the GNT, NLT, CEV and Phillips all think the context lacks the sort of flow-of-thoughts that the English word *for* flags. Hence, they leave the γὰρ untranslated.

ἡ παράκλησις ἡμῶν *our encouragement or our exhortation*. παράκλησις is in the nominative case, indicating that Paul intended παράκλησις as the subject of this sentence. There is no stated verb in this sentence, but leaving the verb *to be* (ἐστίν) implied is common not only in the NT and LXX, but also among Classical Greek authors. For example:

- Plato:³ ἀλλὰ τί μέλλει; [ἐστίν implied] *But what else [is it]?*
- Sophocles:⁴ δεινὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος [ἐστίν implied] *Terrible [is] the man.*
- Thucydides:⁵ βραχεῖα ἡ ἀκμή [ἐστίν implied] *Brief [is] the moment of success.*

¹¹ Or even more disturbingly, in it for the sex.

In Canada, in a list of 28 professions, ranked by how trusted they are, clergy are near the bottom of the list—better than used car salesmen, but far below grocery store clerks.
<https://www.marugroup.net/s/CanadasMROccupationsRelease.pdf>.

² Private conversation from October, 2024.

³ *Republic*, 352a (Loeb 237, 276).

⁴ *Ajax*, 75 (Loeb 20).

⁵ *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.70.3 (Loeb 108).

- Aristotle:¹ χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ [ἐστὶν implied] *Noble things [are] difficult.*

ἡμῶν is a genitive plural personal pronoun, indicating possession (*our*).

The preposition ἐκ appears as ἐξ when the next word begins with a vowel. Hence, **ἐκ πλάνης** *out of error* and **ἐξ ἀκαθαρσίας** *out of impurity*. Both forms of this word, ἐκ and ἐξ, are invariably followed by genitive nouns.

οὐκ...οὐδέ...οὐδέ *not...nor...nor*. οὐκ serves as the primary/initial negation. οὐδέ...οὐδέ functions as *nor...nor*, or perhaps *neither...nor*.

You may render this along the lines of *Our exhortation to you is not based on/does not spring from/is not rooted in πλάνης error, ἀκαθαρσίας impurity or δόλω deceit.*

ἀκαθαρσίας introduces you to the negating qualities of an initial ἀ—. If ἀκαθαρσίας is *impurity*, then κάθαρσις is *cleansing, purification*.

If θεός is *God*, then ἄθεος is *without God*.

There was a Greek legend about a tribe of women warriors, who—in order to better use a bow and arrow—amputated one breast. They were known as the Amazons, from the word Ἀμαζών, itself said to be derived from ἀ- plus a variant of μαστός *breast* (*breastless*, or *one-breasted*).

About them, Hippocrates reported:

*The women of this nation ride horses, shoot arrows, and throw javelins from horseback, and fight against their enemies as long as they remain virgins; and they do not lay aside their virginity until they have killed three of their enemies.*²

The legend of the Amazons is thought by modern scholars to be untrue. But just knowing the legend has helped me remember the value of the ἀ— prefix before a word for over half a century now.³

¹ *Metaphysics*, 1003a (Loeb 271, 287).

² Hippocrates, *On Airs, Waters, and Places*, Chapter 17.

³ This is totally off-topic from 1 Thessalonians, but there is a delightful 1943 Rogers and Hart tune from a

Broadway musical set in Greek mythology, called *Everything I've Got*, sung by Hippolyta, the Queen of the Amazons to her stylishly dressed, but ineffective husband. Perhaps as you are translating this verse, you should listen to Ella

Error is more than an innocent mistake. It means a wandering from the path of truth, a voluntary (and therefore sinful) giving in to influences which lead one astray (see 2 Thess. 2:11; Ephesians 4:14). *Impurity* (motives is implied) can mean literal or ritual uncleanness, but it is often associated with sexual immorality (e.g. in Romans 1:24; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5).¹

Paul distancing himself from impurity—by which he might be meaning sexual immorality—seems to make this passage even more relevant to us today.

Christianity Today magazine published an article² on September 3, 2024, talking about how eight different mega-church pastors in the Dallas, Texas, area—representing churches that collectively have over 50,000 members—have resigned because of moral failings over the course of the summer of 2024. Two of these eight were actually arrested by the police for rape and solicitation of a prostitute.

So Paul is making an effort to distance himself from people in his day that were in a position to influence the people of God—but who were actually wolves in sheep’s clothing. These people exist today, just as they did in the early church.

There does not appear to be much of a distinction in meaning in the shift from ἐκ/ἐξ³ for the first two items in the list to ἐν⁴ for the last item. While the *Chicago Manual of Style* does not have a specific rule about repetition of words, it does encourage people to use synonyms or alternate phrasing when possible, whenever one can do so without sacrificing clarity. It may well be that the Apostle Paul brought some of this same approach to his own writing.

2:4

But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News, in this same way we speak not as ones who are trying to please men, but to please the God who examines our hearts.

Fitzgerald sing this tune from
<https://youtu.be/sI3mV0qL8lY>.

¹ Nida and Ellingworth, op.cit., 24–25.

² <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/09/megachurch-dallas-mourns->

[pastor-scandals/?utm_medium=widgetsocial](https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/09/megachurch-dallas-mourns-pastor-scandals/?utm_medium=widgetsocial).

³ Followed, as always, by a genitive noun or pronoun.

⁴ Invariably to be followed by a dative noun or pronoun.

ἀλλὰ *But* is rendered by the NIV as just the strong sort of conjunction we would typically expect it to be: *On the contrary*.

καθὼς *just as* and **οὕτως** *in this same way* operate as a matched pair, setting up a comparison. This pairing is a common device for setting up a comparison in Greek. For example:

- Acts 7:48 - καθὼς ὁ προφήτης λέγει...οὕτως λέγει κύριος *Just as the prophet says...so says the Lord*.
- Plato's Republic (Book 4, 435b) - καθὼς ἐν πόλει, οὕτως καὶ ἐν ἐνὸς ἐκάστου τῇ ψυχῇ *Just as in a city, so also in each individual's soul*.

δεδοκιμάσμεθα *we have been approved* is a perfect passive verb. If it was aorist, it would be rendered as *we approved*. If it was perfect active, it would be *we have approved*. This being a perfect passive makes it *we have been approved*. A passive voice verb usually includes a be-verb in its translation.

In a passive verb, the one doing the action is not the same as the subject of the verb. In this verse, God is the one doing the action of approving. *We* (i.e., Paul, Timothy and Silas) are the subject of the verb.

Given that Paul wrote this word as a *perfect* passive rather than an aorist passive, it indicates that the approval of God happened in the past, and continues on into the present.

It is easy to remember one possible way to render ὑπὸ if you are diabetic. ὑπὸ plus an accusative noun is rendered as *under* or *beneath*. In the 19th century, this preposition would be transliterated as *hypo*.¹ Hence, *hypoglycemia* is low blood sugar.

The contrasting preposition is ὑπέρ, transcribed two centuries ago as *hyper*, plus an accusative is rendered as *over and above, beyond, more than*. High blood sugar is then called *hyperglycemia*.

However, in this case, ὑπὸ is not being followed by an accusative noun, but by a genitive. This being the case, it should be rendered as *by means of*, or simply *by*. So Paul is saying, we have been approved ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ *by God*.

¹ In the 21st century we tend to transliterate this as *hupo*.

πιστεῦσαι *to trust in* is an aorist active infinitive. πιστευθῆναι *to be entrusted with* is an aorist passive infinitive. Once again, with a passive verb, the subjects of the sentence (i.e., Paul and his friends) are not the ones doing the action of the verb—God is.

τὸ εὐαγγέλιον *the Good News* is in the accusative case, and so it the direct object of the verb, to be entrusted with. So they were entrusted with the Good News.

There is an interesting translation issue here. Do we translate in keeping with Paul's grammar—with a passive voice verb? Recent research into how we humans process information suggests that we comprehend sentences written in the active voice more readily and more accurately than we do sentences written with passive voice verbs.¹

So the GNT² feels that they can legitimately translate the Greek of 1 Thess. 2:4 in a way that improves reader comprehension by rephrasing it with an active voice verb: *God has judged us worthy to be entrusted with the Good News.*

The ESV, which places a lower priority on readability and comprehension,³ retains the passive voice: *We have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel.*⁴

According to Statistics Canada, 49% of the Canadian population scores below high-school levels of literacy, with 17% scoring in the lowest level of literacy.⁵ As a Bible translator, you will need to think about the target audience for your translation, and their level of literacy.

¹ Cemara Education and Science. "Passive Voice and Active Voice." *Cemara Education and Science* 2, no. 2 (2023).
<https://doi.org/10.62145/ces.v2i2.52>.

Uzmi, Muhammad Fadhil, Tasya Nadira, and Yani Lubis. "Experimental Study In Comparing The Effects Of Active And Passive Sentences On Reader Comprehension In Academic Texts." *Quality: Journal Of Education, Arabic And Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2024): 20-26.
<https://doi.org/10.58355/qwt.v2i1.37>.

² So also NLT and CEV.

³ See the section of the chapter on *Translation Helps* called *WWLLS* for a fuller discussion of this curious situation.

⁴ There is a discussion in 1:5 about the use of the word *Gospel* vs. the use of the phrase *Good News*.

⁵ United for Literacy, *Skills for Success: 2022 National Report* 2022.
https://www.unitedforliteracy.ca/getmedia/44cba824-0daf-4e29-8367-cbb3b4539aba/2022-United-for-Literacy-Adult-Report-EN_.pdf.

2:5

For we never came with flattering words, as you know, nor as a pretext for greed. God is our witness.

The conjunction **γάρ** *for*—as always, coming second in the sentence—connects this verse logically to the previous discussion, providing supporting evidence for what Paul has said about his ministry.

The verse begins with a compound negative construction **οὔτε...οὔτε** *neither...nor*, which creates a parallel structure emphasizing two things Paul and his companions did not do.

ποτε *ever* is added for emphasis. While often translated as *at any time, ever*, when it is used with **οὔτε**, we have *neither at any time/not ever = never*.

The main verb is **ἐγενήθημεν** *we were* the first person aorist passive indicative plural from γίνομαι, *to be* or *to happen*.

Normally we consider that an active voice verb might be like *I played the piano*. The subject of the sentence, *I*, is also the one who does the action of the verb, *to play*.

To render a passive voice in English, we typically include a form of *to be* as a partner of the main verb. *The piano was played*. *The piano* is now the grammatical subject of the sentence, but the one doing the action of the verb is not the subject of the sentence, but some human.

When you have a first person plural aorist active of a verb meaning *to be*, you translate it along the lines of *We were*. But you cannot simply add an auxiliary *be*-verb next to the main *be*-verb to make it passive. *We ~~were~~ were(?)*.

There are strong indications by the time the NT was being composed, and the first letter to the Thessalonians in particular, that the verb γίνομαι had lost its passive flavor¹ even when Paul wrote it using a passive word form.²

Consequently, the best way to render this verb is as though it was written using an active voice.

That said, ἐγενήθημεν can still be challenging to translate, as the word has a fairly broad lexical range—four pages of small print in the BDAG lexicon. A mechanical translation would be something like *we became* or *we were*, but in English, it's often smoother to render it in this context as *we came* or even *we acted*. Many English translations render it along these lines:

- *For we never came with...* (ESV, NASB, NIV)
- *For we never appeared with...* (NET)
- *You know we never used...* (NLT)

The verb is connected to the phrase ἐν λόγῳ κολακείας *in speech of flattery*, so the overall idea is that Paul and his companions never engaged in or resorted to flattering speech.

Therefore, a good rendering in context would be *For we never came with flattering speech* or *For we never engaged in flattering speech*.

καθὼς οἴδατε *just as you know*. Or perhaps, *just as you yourselves know*.

¹ Susan E. Kmetko (2018), *The Function and Significance of Middle Voice Verbs in the Greek New Testament*, [Doctoral dissertation, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne], 60ff.
https://acuresearchbank.acu.edu.au/download/0c7851bb0839c87acb7112126efede8e9e9f62b52c7d59d56b545aaead8cd45e/3466164/KMETKO_2018_The_function_and_significance_of_middle_voice.pdf.

² If a passive verb is used where the subject of the sentence is not the do-er of the action, we could speculate who Paul might

have thought was the one actually doing the action of this verse. God perhaps.

But it would be wrong to try and weave this distinction into your translation. It is simply too subtle. It is our job as preachers/teachers/translators to help people wrap their heads around the clear teaching of whatever passage we are in.

Further, in light of Kmetko's thesis—which she later worked into a book: <https://a.co/d/0nGnt4h>—it may not be what Paul intended at all.

You can decide as a translator, based on your read of the context, whether Paul was emphasizing the Thessalonians first hand experience enough to justify including as you *yourselves* in your English language version.

Paul is defending his behavior. But he does not have to find somebody whom the Thessalonians respect to validate his integrity. He appeals to the Thessalonians' own experience of being around Paul.

I find it odd that Paul was needing to defend himself only a few months after having been in Thessalonica in person. On the other hand, Paul faced serious opposition in Thessalonica from the very beginning, as we read in Acts 17. That opposition may have been continuous even after he left.¹

The phrase **ἐν προφάσει πλεονεξίας** as a *pretext for greed* is built the same way. The preposition ἐν is always followed by a dative noun. So it is no surprise that προφάσει is the dative singular of πρόφασις, a *pretext* or an *excuse*.

The most common ways to render a genitive noun is *from*, *of*, *for*. So in this context, the genitive πλεονεξίας is *for greed*. So Paul is saying that they never used flattery, nor did anything as a pretext, or as a cloak, for greed.

As we read this, we may find ourselves thinking, *It would be nice to review some writings from outside the Bible to get a better feel for what religious charlatans were doing in the culture at this point in time.*

While the Greeks were a chatty people, who wrote about almost every topic you can imagine—there are more than 20 million words of Greek text in the Loeb

¹ I was once driven out of a church where I was a member. The elders decided for reasons of their own to slander me. I decided that a church with these kind of people in leadership was not the kind of community I wanted to be a part of—so I left.

I have not thought much about it until writing this commentary, but they may well have continued to slander me

after I was gone. That was not much of a concern for me one way or the other, as I simply shook the dust off my feet and moved on.

But in the case of Thessalonica, the spiritual health of the Christian community hinged on them continuing to accept guidance from Paul, and to model their approach to following Jesus on his.

Classics Library¹— it is worth remembering that the NT you hold in your hand is one of our primary sources about life in the first century Roman Empire.²

There may be no better source, in fact, than the letters of Paul in helping us understand, or at least to infer, what was going on in the religious landscape of the Aegean Basin of the first century.³

We have run into the equative nominative construction before, in verse 2:1. And there is a fairly extensive discussion of it in 1:6.

The equative nominative we see in this verse, **θεὸς μάρτυς** *God [is my] witness* is a bit different because the be-verb is implied rather than explicitly included (as in 1:6 and 2:1). Normally, all verbs are explicitly included in Greek sentences. The only exception is if we are meant to understand it to be some form of the be-verb—either εἶμι or γίνομαι.⁴

¹ Loeb is publishing new volumes every year, but at present there are around 359 volumes in the Greek portion of the Loeb Library. The average Loeb volume contains around 400-500 pages, with Greek text on one side and English on the other, so approximately 200-250 pages of Greek per volume. Each page typically contains around 200-300 words of Greek text. Doing a rough calculation:

359 volumes × 225 pages of Greek per volume × 250 words per page = approximately 20,193,750 words of Greek

² Notwithstanding, the Loeb Classical Library is a treasure, and will let you translate for yourself a vast number of volumes that have helped to shape not just 1st century Mediterranean Basin, but all of subsequent Western Civilization. 277 of the Loeb volumes have entered the public domain so far, and are available for free download at <http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.com/2012/06/loebolus-loebs.html>.

³ There are several sources that can help us understand religious charlatans in our

own culture. A good place to start is <https://julieroys.com/>.

⁴ An exception to this general rule is found in book 1 of the diary kept by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, written in Greek some time around A.D. 170. Likely, given that this was a diary, Aurelius never intended his writing to be for publication, and was just making abbreviated notes for himself.

Given that the context makes it clear that be-verbs will not fit, translators of Aurelius's work debate among themselves exactly which verbs should be inserted in these sentences.

I am less intrigued by the absence of these verbs than I am by the fact that Aurelius was writing in Greek rather than Latin. This fits with Paul's letter to the Roman church being written in Greek rather than Latin. In the first and second centuries, Greek really was the universal language of the Mediterranean Basin, even in the heart of the Empire.

The as-yet unpublished *Translator's Commentary on Luke* will unpack hints from that gospel that Greek was actually the language of the synagogues in Galilee in Jesus's day.

With two nominative nouns, we understand that God \approx witness, or more properly that one *aspect* of God is that he is a witness who stands behind what Paul is saying.

Most translators believe that to get Paul was saying translated into the language that English speakers use and understand, they should expand *God is witness* into something like:

- *God is our witness* (GNT, NIV, NLT)
- *God himself knows what we did wasn't a cover-up for greed.* (CEV)
- *God himself is witness to our honesty* (Phillips).

So as Paul is defending his motives and his behavior, he says that both the Thessalonian believers and God himself validate his integrity.

2:6

Neither did we ever seek honor from people—not from you, nor from anyone.

For the sake of readability, PB breaks this verse out as a new sentence, but there is no main verb in this sentence, only a participle. And the οὔτε...οὔτε...οὔτε...οὔτε...οὔτε structure in verses 5 and 6 makes it clear that Paul thought of these verses as part of the same sentence.

We Christians are pretty good at seeking honor from others without appearing to do so. One can imagine the Apostle Peter saying, “You know, it sure makes me feel humble to think that Jesus will build his church on...well...on *me*.”¹

To which his brother Andrew might have replied, “Yes, you are going to be important, to be sure. And I sometimes wonder...what would have happened had I not...introduced you to Jesus. Yes. It definitely does make one feel humble.”²

But Paul says οὔτε ζητοῦντες ἐξ ἀνθρώπων δόξαν *neither did we seek honor from any people.*

Many translations render δόξα as *glory*. This is, however, a word that is passing out of use in English except among church people. See 2:12 and 2:16 where I

¹ Matt. 16:18

² John 1:41-42

discuss the rendering of this word. Also see *Word Studies and Context* in the chapter called *Translation Helps*.

ζητοῦντες is a present tense participle, but it is appropriate to translate it as a past tense in English, because of the context of this verse.

The most crucial aspect of participle tense in Koine Greek is that it indicates *relative* time, not absolute time. The tense of a participle expresses time relative to the main verb of the sentence, not to the speaker or writer. This means:

- A present tense participle usually indicates action occurring simultaneously with the main verb.
- An aorist participle typically denotes action that precedes the main verb.
- A perfect participle generally signifies a completed action with ongoing results at the time of the main verb.

Further, the tense of a participle in Koine Greek also conveys aspect, which is often more significant than the time-relationship with the main verb:

- Present participles express continuous or repeated action.
- Aorist participles indicate a simple occurrence of the action.
- Perfect participles emphasize the resultant state of a completed action.

The main verb in this sentence is the aorist tense ἐγενήθημεν back in verse 5. Since this is a present participle, the action of not-seeking-honor occurred at the same time as the action of the main verb, i.e., of Paul's visit to Thessalonica.

Since the aspect of a present tense participle indicates ongoing action, PB tries to capture this aspect by rendering this as *Neither did we ever seek honor from people*. That is, *at no time* during his visit to Thessalonica did Paul or any of his companions seek the praise of people.

δόξαν is accusative case—the direct object of the participle. *We did not seek recognition/honor/fame*.

ἐξ ἀνθρώπων *from people* is a prepositional phrase that gives us more information about the honor they were not seeking. It was recognition/honor/fame *from people*.

The plural forms of ἄνθρωπος are typically translated as the gender-inclusive *people*—both men and women.

Unless the context somehow indicates that ἄνθρωπος is to be understood in a strictly masculine way, we normally expect that if a biblical author means just men he will use some form of the word ἀνὴρ.

If one or more women is being referred to, the word used is γυνή.

οὔτε ἀφ’ ὑμῶν οὔτε ἀπ’ ἄλλων *neither from you, nor from anyone.*

ἐξ and ἀπό—both of which can be translated as *from*.

Let’s stop a moment. I sense that you are asking, if ἐξ and ἀπό both mean the same thing, why did Paul use two prepositions rather than one? Consider this section of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*:

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
and by opposing end them.

Why did Shakespeare use two words—*slings* and *arrows*—where one would have sufficed? In context, they both amount to the same thing.

If Shakespeare wanted to talk about life’s difficulties, why did he use two different phrases to describe them: *outrageous fortune* and *sea of troubles*?

Why did Shakespeare uses two different phrases that mean the same thing, *take arms against* and *opposing*, when just one would have served?

The answer to the Shakespeare questions is the same as the answer to the question about Paul’s prepositions. Both Shakespeare and Paul were gifted communicators, and both thought that their writing would be more effective with their intended audiences if they used some variety in their words.

Now, let’s return to ἐξ and ἀπό. They are both prepositions that are always followed by a genitive noun or pronoun. So indeed it is here, with ἀνθρώπων as the genitive plural of ἄνθρωπος, and ὑμῶν as genitive plural of the pronoun σύ *you*. ἄλλων is the genitive plural masculine of the adjective ἄλλος *another*.

There are some interesting spelling changes here, as ἀπό becomes ἀπ' when the next word starts with a vowel that has a smooth breathing mark (ἀπ' ἄλλων), and ἀφ' when the next word starts with a vowel with a rough breathing mark (ἀφ' ὑμῶν).¹

Do Not Memorize This!!

Greeks made these spelling changes because they *sounded right* to them. This is much the same as we do in English where we use an *a* as the indefinite article where the next word starts with a consonant (*a book*) and an *an* where the next word starts with a vowel (*an elephant*).

In addition to dropping the final vowel of a preposition, the Greeks liked these consonant changes in front of a word with a vowel using rough breathing:

- π becomes φ
- κ becomes χ
- τ becomes θ

Hence:

- ἀπό + ἐαυτῶν becomes ἀφ' ἐαυτῶν
- ἐκ + ἡμέρας becomes ἐχ' ἡμέρας
- κατὰ + ἡμέραν becomes καθ' ἡμέραν

In one more *sounds good* twist, the Greeks liked to use ἐκ when the next word started with a consonant, and ἐξ where it started with a vowel with smooth breathing. Hence:

- ἐκ πόλεως — *out of the city*
- ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν — *from Athens*

Similarly:

- κατὰ becomes κατ' before a vowel with a smooth breathing.

¹ You do not need to remember this, but the Greek-teacher word for this process of

dropping a vowel, and sometimes changing a consonant, is called elision.

You do not need to memorize all this. For now, just file away in the back of your head that these are sets of prepositions that go with each other:

- ἐκ/ἐκ'/ἐξ
- ἀπό/ἀπ'/ἀφ'
- κατά/κατ'/καθ'

These prepositions are all common enough that you will run into them again and again.

2:7

Although we had the right to throw our weight around, as Christ's apostles, we were gentle among you, as if we were a nursing mother, cherishing her own children.

Paul uses the plural **ἀπόστολοι** *apostles* referring not only to himself but to Timothy and Silas as well. To understand what Paul meant by this word, it is helpful to look to how the word was used in first century rabbinic literature.¹

The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT) and the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* alike seek to understand just what Jesus was connoting when he named his key followers *apostles*. The first point TDNT makes is that שְׁלִיחַ *shaliach* was translated using ἀπόστολος in the LXX of 2 Chron 17:7.

The second point is that Rabbinic writings of the first century suggest that שְׁלִיחַ was a word commonly understood to have a legal element as part of its core meaning.

A שְׁלִיחַ had full, delegated authority in the culture...even to the extent of being empowered to commit to a betrothal. *In such a case, the one commissioned validly performs all the ceremonies in place of the bridegroom concerned.*²

¹ Gerhard Kittel, , Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 414f.

See also Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament*

Theology and Exegesis (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 366ff.

² Talmud tractate *Betrothal*, Quidduschin

And if a רש"י instituted a divorce, it could not be reversed by the husband. *The Rabbis summed up the basis of רש"י in the frequently quoted statement: 'the one sent by a man is as the man himself.'*¹

So when Paul said that he was an *apostle* of Jesus Christ, his Jewish hearers, at least, would have understood him to be saying that he had, essentially, a POA (power of attorney) for Jesus. The ways that Paul uses the word ἀπόστολος, the context of his usage, suggests that he may have understood that office in a way similar to how the Rabbis understood רש"י.

We have always understood that Paul perceived himself to have full delegated authority to speak on behalf of Jesus.

The only nuance this material adds is that in his mentoring of the twelve, when Jesus named them רש"י/ἀπόστολος, they would have understood this to be an enormous responsibility/position of trust...greater than that of a (mere) disciple, and Paul clearly felt this role/status had been extended to him as well.

δυνάμενοι is a present middle/passive participle, nominative plural masculine, from δύναμαι. As a participle, it functions here as what Greek textbooks call a *concessive clause* that could be translated as *although being able* or *though we could have*. The nominative case shows it refers to the same subject as the main verb.

A concessive clause expresses a contrast or a concession - it acknowledges a fact that seems to contradict or work against the main clause, but doesn't actually prevent the main clause from being true. In English, we often introduce concessive clauses with words like *although*, *even though*, *despite*, or *in spite of*.

Let me break this down with the specific example from 1 Thessalonians 2:7:

- Main idea: *we became gentle among you*
- Concessive clause: *though we could have been imposing as apostles*

The concession here is that Paul and his companions had the authority or ability (δυνάμενοι) to be imposing, BUT (here's the contrast) they chose not to use that authority and instead became gentle.

¹ Ibid.

Here are some everyday English examples of concessive clauses:

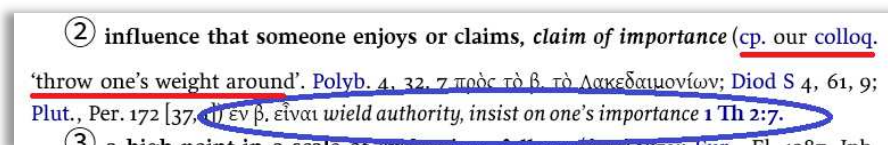
- *Although it was raining (concession), we still went for a walk.*
- *Despite being tired (concession), she finished her work.*
- *Even though he could have won (concession), he let his little brother win the game.*

In each case, the concessive clause presents a circumstance that you might expect would prevent the main action, but does not. Just like in our verse—you might expect that having apostolic authority would lead to Paul being imposing or demanding, but instead he chose gentleness.

The participle δυνάμενοι in Greek works this way because of its context and relationship to the main verb ἐγενήθημεν *we became*. While the participle by itself doesn't necessarily indicate concession, its use here with ἀλλὰ *but* helps create this concessive meaning.

ἐν βάρει εἶναι *to insist on one's importance* forms an infinitive phrase. ἐν with the dative βάρει creates an idiomatic expression. The infinitive εἶναι complements δυνάμενοι, expressing what they were able to do.

Looking up βάρος in BDAG, we find this:



Note that this rendering for βάρος specifically mentions 1 Thess. 2:7. In your own translation you can render this phrase in different ways. PB uses the colloquial expression that BDAG mentions (underlined in red—to *throw one's weight around*). But the more colloquial your translation is, the more likely it is to become dated.

ὡς Χριστοῦ ἀπόστολοι *as apostles of Christ* functions as an equative nominative phrase. You will recall the equative nominative from 1 John 4:8 ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν *God is love*. The equative nominative is when you have two nouns that refer to the same person or thing, connected by a be-verb. In this case, both God and love are in the nominative case.

Here in 1 Thess. 2:7, both the implied *we* of the verb ἐγενήθημεν *we were* and the word ἀπόστολοι *apostles* refer to the same people, with γίνομαι as a be-verb. Hence, ἀπόστολοι is in the nominative case.

Χριστοῦ *of Christ* is in the genitive case, indicating possession—apostles belonging to Christ.

ἀλλὰ *but, although* is the strong-contrast conjunction, marking a sharp difference between what could have been and what actually occurred.

ἐγενήθημεν *we were* is the main verb of the sentence, first person plural aorist of γίνομαι. The aorist tense indicates a specific past event—his time in Thessalonica. StepBible classifies this as a passive indicative verb. But in English it is difficult to distinguish between an passive voice be-verb and a middle voice be-verb. You would render either as *we became*.

ἡπιοι *gentle ones* is a second equative nominative. Paul is saying that *we were* (implied *we* plus a be-verb) both *apostles* and *gentle ones*.

ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν *in your midst* is a prepositional phrase. ἐν *in* is followed with the dative μέσῳ *midst*. ὑμῶν is the genitive plural personal pronoun—*of you*.

Historically, Roman Catholics and certain Pentecostal groups have been very interested in focusing in on the *power* they feel has been vested in their leaders. Paul was certainly capable of engaging in power confrontations, but did not seem to gravitate that way unless forced into it. The maternal metaphor (τροφὸς...τέκνα) subverts Greco-Roman leadership models (and our own), privileging nurture over power

ὥς ἔαν τροφὸς θάλπῃ τὰ ἑαυτῆς τέκνα *as if we were a nursing mother, cherishing her child*. One use of the subjunctive is to capture hypothetical situations. In contrast, the indicative is about things that are facts, not just possibilities.

So when Paul says ὥς ἔαν *as if* τροφὸς *a nursing mother* θάλπῃ *cherishing* τὰ ἑαυτῆς τέκνα *her own children*, he uses the subjunctive verb θάλπῃ because he was not, of course, actually a nursing mother. This is a hypothetical he is proposing, so a subjunctive verb is more appropriate than an indicative.

This reads well in English, but may have been received even more forcefully by the Thessalonians, because of talking about how a nursing woman would care for τὰ ἑαυτῆς *her own* children. It communicates powerfully about the intimate

and nurturing relationship Paul and his companions had with the Thessalonian believers.

If Paul is contrasting how a nursing mother cares for her own children, in contrast to how a nursing woman might care for *other* people's children, he would be making reference to a cultural practice that is quite unfamiliar to us in 21st century Canada. I decided to look into this, both for curiosity's sake as well as to do the best I can in translating this verse.

It was common in many pre-20th-century cultures for elite class women to employ wet nurses—women who, when they finished breast feeding their own child, transitioned to breast feeding the children of other women.

The advantages of this system were that the woman employing the wet nurse did not have to go through the physical challenges of breast-feeding on a schedule, and could return to social activities more quickly. Further, breast feeding suppresses ovulation, and acts as a sort of natural birth control. So then, *not* breast feeding would facilitate having more children. It was common for upper class families who could afford a wet nurse to be larger than lower class families for this reason.¹

Circling back to verse 7, it might be expected that if a woman nursed another woman's child and cared deeply for that child, *how much more* would they care for *their own* children.

Given that in Canada and the United States, we have replaced the wet nurse with baby formulas made by Nestlé and Abbott Nutrition, the gap between our culture and that of first century Rome is such that there is no good way to communicate all that Paul may have been trying to imply in this verse.

The best we can do is to just translate the words as we find them, and say that *we were gentle among you, as if we were a nursing mother, cherishing her own children*, and leave it at that.

¹ It is a recent development, culturally speaking, for prosperous families to be smaller than the families of the poor.

2:8

So then, because of the way you were in our hearts, we wanted to share with you not only the Good News of God but even our very own selves, you were so dearly loved by us.

Paul is worth emulating here in his approach to discipling people. He did not just share the information about Jesus and his resurrection, but shared his very life with the people he was mentoring.

This probably suggests that we will be at our most effective in influencing people if we share transparently with them—things we are learning, things we have already learned, areas where we are struggling. What we want to do is not just share dynamic and entertaining sermons, but to expose younger believers to a model of a life lived with Jesus—our own life.

The most influential man in my life, other than my father, was the one who was my supervisor for the first five years of my life after leaving school, as I worked for Canadian Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.

He took this verse as his touchstone for relating to me. I ended up knowing most of the things that could be known about him: not just how to be better in ministering to students, but how he navigated his marriage, managed his finances, things he learned in his daily Bible reading, how he coped when he made a bad decision.

While our formal supervisory relationship only lasted five years, he continued to be a close friend and mentor over the subsequent 40 years.

What makes a long term discipling relationship continue to work is that some of the issues and challenges change as we move through the various seasons of life. In each of those seasons, I have been left saying, “He is who I want to be like when I get to be his age.”

I have attempted to carry this model into my own relationships, even if it is just a group of young people that I am with for a week as I teach them sailing. I want to do as Paul did, to share not just boat-handling skills with them, but my very own self.

And I have one young man—not so young anymore!—that I have had lunch with every Wednesday for the past 20 years, trying to be to him what my old IVCF supervisor was to me.

οὕτως ὁμειρόμενοι ὑμῶν εὐδοκοῦμεν μεταδοῦναι ὑμῖν *In the same way, because we longed for you, and we were pleased to share with you.*

Participles were enormously flexible bits of Greek grammar, and have several uses in the NT. One of these uses is to express causes/reasons for the action of the main verb.

In this context, ὁμειρόμενοι *to long for, yearn after* is explaining WHY Paul and his companions were pleased to share—because they were yearning for/longing for the Thessalonians. The participle provides the grounds or reason for the action of the main verb εὐδοκοῦμεν *to be well pleased, to want to*.

Therefore, this would be better translated with a causal sense: *Because we were yearning for you, we were pleased to share....*

ὑμῶν *for you*. One of the uses of the genitive is its built-in quality of including the preposition *of/from/for*, even where no preposition is stated. You decide on how to render it by seeing what fits best in the context.

The infinitive μεταδοῦναι *to share* functions as a partner to εὐδοκοῦμεν *we were pleased*, complementing and completing the content of what Paul and his companions were pleased to do.

ὑμῖν *with you*. Paul could have written ἐν ὑμῖν *with you* using the explicit preposition ἐν. But he felt that by using a dative case for the pronoun you, the in would be clear from the context, as though the preposition were built into the dative case.

εὐδοκοῦμεν is an imperfect active indicative. Imperfect verbs usually describe action that takes place in past time, similar to the aorist. But while the aorist thinks of the action as in some way complete, the imperfect expresses that the action is ongoing.

Paul is saying that he had a sustained, ongoing priority of caring for the believers in Thessalonica.

ὁμειρόμενοι is a present participle. But this does not mean that the action of this participle is in the present time. Participles deal not in absolute time (is this action occurring in the present or the past?) but in *time relative to the main verb*. The action of this participle, *desiring*, happened concurrently with the action of εὐδοκοῦμεν in the past.

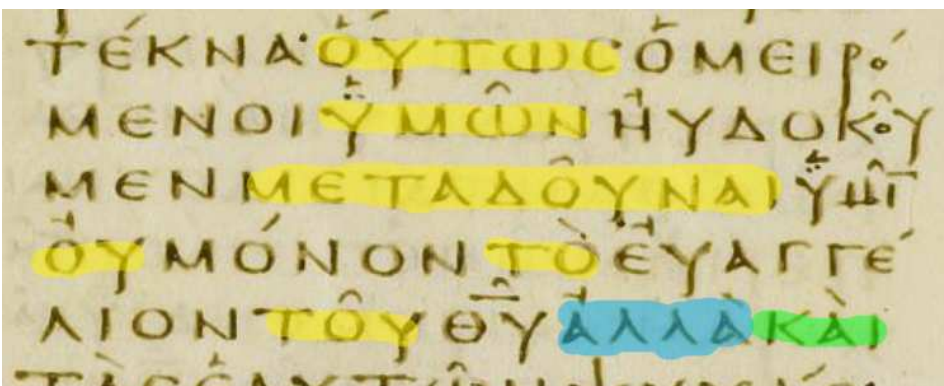
οὐ μόνον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ *not only the Good News of God*. You should find all the components of this phrase fairly easy.

- οὐ is *not*.
- μόνον for *only* is easy to remember. In English a *monorail* is a train with *only* one track instead of two. *Monotheism* is the belief in *only* one god.
- μόνον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον is accusative case because it is the direct object of the infinitive *to share*.
- We discussed the issue around translating εὐαγγέλιον back in 1:5.
- We have discussed the presence of the article before the name θεοῦ in 1:2-3.
- You know by now that the genitive τοῦ θεοῦ is most naturally translated as *of God*.

ἀλλὰ καὶ is a stronger way to communicate *but* than just ἀλλὰ alone.

We do not have a copy of Paul's original letter to Thessalonica. However, here is a copy that was made less than 300 years later. This is from *Codex Vaticanus*, which is one of the two oldest complete copies of the Bible that we have (the other is *Codex Sinaiticus*).

Here is a copy from Vaticanus which begins with the last word of 2:7, τέκνα, and includes the first half of 2:8, with every other word highlighted in yellow, to help you read it. Note particularly the ἀλλὰ καὶ, written in upper case letters with no accents as ΑΛΛΑΚΑΙ, highlighted with green and blue.



Likely, had the Greeks thought of any of the typographical features that seem so common to us like *italics*, **bold**, or underlining, Paul would have included ἀλλὰ and italicized or underlined it, since he wanted to strongly emphasize the

contrast between merely sharing the Good News, and sharing their very souls with the Thessalonians.

However, since that option had not yet been thought of,¹ Paul emphasized the contrast by using two conjunctions instead of one: ἀλλὰ καὶ.

There are a couple of features in this manuscript that you may find a little difficult. First, the ὑμῖν at the end of the third line is written as YMI[¯], with an oddly-shaped upper case μ.

You may notice a breathing mark, and a circumflex accent, as well as two mysterious dots over the upper case Ὑ. An ink analysis has revealed that the original scribe used no breathing marks or accents. They were added some centuries later.²

The other interesting thing is the horizontal line. The scribe was running out of room on the third line, so rather than writing YMIN, he omitted the final character and inserted the horizontal line. He was confident that his readers would recognize the word ὑμῖν by its role in the context.

This shortening of a word, using a horizontal line, also occurs in the the final line as θεοῦ is written as θ[¯]υ. This is something that this scribe of Vaticanus did all the time. He included the first letter of θεός, followed by a horizontal line, with just the last character included so the reader would know whether the word was genitive, accusative, dative, or nominative.

It is possible that he felt this was a way of expressing reverence for the name of God. Or perhaps he just wrote *God* so often that this was an easy abbreviation.³

¹ It had not yet been a thousand years since the Greeks invented what we consider the Greek alphabet, and learned to read and write in it. Things like underlining, and even spaces between words, would not be invented for several more centuries.

² Still, this does tell us that the style of circumflex that looks like an arch, $\hat{\omega}$, is more traditional—by more than a thousand years—than the one borrowed

from the Spanish tilde $\tilde{\omega}$, popularized by Microsoft when they brought out the *Arial Unicode MS* font in year 2000.

³ When I took my Master of Divinity degree, it was in the pre-PC-computer era, and I did a LOT of handwriting of notes. I regularly abbreviated Christ as $\chi^{\text{¯}}$ and Christians as $\chi^{\text{¯ns}}$.

τὰς ἐαυτῶν ψυχὰς *the of-ourselves souls* is a mechanical translation of these words. Your English rendering will probably run along the lines of *our very lives, our own lives, our very hearts, our very own selves*.

τὰς ψυχὰς is in the accusative case as it is the direct object of μεταδοῦναι.

ψυχή, which is the root of the English word psyche, referred strictly to the mind, not the body, in the writing of Plato. While it is likely that Paul had read Plato, we should not underestimate the impact that the Old Testament had on Paul's thinking. He probably understood ψυχή as the best available Greek word for translating the Hebrew concept of נֶפֶשׁ, where the soul is not separate from but integrated with the body—representing the whole living person.

διότι, *because*, provides the reason for their willingness to share both gospel and their lives with the Thessalonians: ἀγαπητοὶ ἡμῖν ἐγενήθητε *you had become dearly loved by us*.

There is no explicit pronoun for *you*. That pronoun is packaged into the verb, which is a 2nd person plural. Had there *been* a pronoun, it would have of course been in the nominative as it would be the subject of the verb.

Even with an implied nominative pronoun, it is possible to have an equative nominative, as Paul has done here. The be-verb is ἐγενήθητε, from γίνομαι. The other half of the equative nominative construction is the nominative plural adjective ἀγαπητοὶ, *dearly loved*. So *You ≈ dearly loved*.

We must decide which preposition Paul intended us to supply when he wrote the dative ἡμῖν. Without any context, we could read it as *to us, with us, by us, to us*. But in this context it can only be *by us*. *You were so dearly loved by us*.

2:9

You remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and effort. Night and day, we worked so as not to be a burden on any of you as we preached to you the Good News of God.

We often idealize what *the early church* was like. But here, just 20 years after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, we have Paul saying how:

- His motives were untainted by impurity or deceit (2:3).
- His evangelistic ministry was not a pretext for greed (2:5).
- He supported himself while in Thessalonica (2:9)

Reading these words is like hearing just half of a phone conversation. But it would seem like there were people floating about who were trying—possibly like those today who expect a substantial tip just for *praying* for you¹—to make a profit from the Gospel.

The difficulties faced by believers who wanted to identify sincere, genuinely born-again evangelists and pastors in the mid-first-century appear to have been shockingly similar to the difficulties we face in the 21st century.

J.B. Phillips brings out Paul's values very clearly in his translation of this verse:

Our struggles and hard work, my brothers, must still be fresh in your minds. Day and night we worked so that our preaching of the Gospel to you might not cost you a penny.

What Paul says about the way he supported himself in Thessalonica (presumably by tentmaking) is in keeping with how Paul supported himself in Ephesus. There, he reminded the church elders *that I have not desired silver, gold, or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine earned enough to provide for both my own needs and those of my companions* (Acts 20:33-34).

It was not that Paul thought, in principle, that being supported in ministry was a bad thing. He argues for its legitimacy in 1 Cor. 9:1-15. But, he says to the Corinthians, *I would rather die than take the first nickel from you.*

Doubtless, Paul was influenced in this conviction by his old mentor, Gamaliel, who wrote:

*Excellent is the study of the torah when combined with a worldly occupation, for toil in them both keeps sin out of one's mind; But [study of the] Torah which is not combined with a worldly occupation, in the end comes to be neglected and becomes the cause of sin.*²

Another rabbi expanded on this and said *Hence, it may be inferred that whosoever derives a profit for himself from the words of the divine law helps on his own destruction.*³

¹ See 2:3.

² Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), Chapter 2, Mishnah 2.
<https://tehillim-online.com/ethics-of-the->

[fathers/pirkei-avot-translated-into-english.](#)

³ Cited in F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame: The Rise And Progress Of Christianity*,

Notice here that the rabbis were not saying that it was good to support yourself with a trade (like tent-making) SO THAT you could support your teaching ministry.

Rather, it seems to have been their perception that there was something important and good about ordinary work that kept a teaching ministry from falling off the rails, theologically, and kept the teacher himself solid with God, personally.

Such was the power of Paul's example—as well as the challenge posed the number of charlatans that appeared almost immediately in the church—that an influential church handbook, written either in the first or the early second century, called *The Didache*¹ said:

Let every apostle, when he comes to you, be received as the Lord;

But he shall not abide more than a single day, or if there be need, a little more.

But if he abide three days, he is a false prophet.

And when he departs, let the apostle receive nothing except bread, until he finds shelter;

*But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet.*²

*And whoever shall say “in the Spirit,” Give me silver or anything else, you shall not listen to him.*³

(Emphasis is my own.)

from 0 to 700 AD (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 16.

¹ The full title is Διδαχὴ Κυρίου διὰ τῶν δώδεκα ἀποστόλων τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, *The Teaching of the Lord Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-lightfoot.html>. Although *The Didache* did not make the final cut for

inclusion in the NT canon, it was certainly considered for inclusion. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) appears to have treated *The Didache* as Scripture, citing it alongside other canonical works.

² Ibid., 11:5-9

³ Ibid., 11:20

γάρ *For* is in its accustomed place—the second word from the beginning. Whether we should translate it or not is another question.

In English, *for* introduces supporting reasons to support a conclusion. *Studying Greek is valuable, for it can deliver insights into Scripture.* γάρ definitely fulfills the role of the English *for* in many passages.

However, you must not be mechanical in rendering γάρ as *for*. 2:9 does not appear to be providing any supporting reasons for what Paul said in 2:8. It appears that Paul is using γάρ just to carry on his story, or possibly as a way to be more emphatic. The PB leaves it completely untranslated: *You remember....* The NIV and GNT treat it as an intensifier: *Surely you remember....*

You as a translator are responsible for a close reading of these verses, and trying to get into the minds of Paul and his friends. Use whatever insights you get to decide what you will do with this γάρ.

μνημονεύετε *you remember* is the main verb. As noted in 1:3, verbs of remembering usually take genitive objects. But here we see **τὸν κόπον** *toil* and **τὸν μόχθον** *effort* in the accusative case instead. So what are we to make of it when Paul does not appear to follow *the rules*. There are several points here:

- I am convinced that Paul had a superb education, and was careful about his writing.¹ It is a safe assumption that his Greek was *correct*.
- Nobody in the ancient world wrote down a detailed grammar of Greek.
- It has been up to us, centuries later, to read Greek, look for patterns of usage, and package those patterns into grammatical rules or principles.
- If our rules do not seem to work, it is not that well-educated ancient writers were erratic. Rather, our rules are not sufficiently nuanced.
- When you see apparent inconsistencies in NT Greek usage, file them away in the back of your mind. Over the next decade or so you can be alert to other instances where you observe the same sort of inconsistency—and then try and sort out what the deep pattern is that binds these instances together.

¹ See 1:6 footnote for the kind of education that Paul probably got in Tarsus. Further, this commentary highlights several words that Paul used in this letter which were uncommon in Koine Greek, but which

were frequently used by Classical Greek philosophers and poets in previous centuries. Paul appears to be well-read.

An example of this working itself out over the course of my lifetime is the way I was taught about the aorist tense. In my Classical Greek classes at university in 1972-74, I was taught that the aorist was about *punctiliar*, or momentary, action in the past.

The only problem with that rule was that around 40% of the occurrences of an aorist tense verb in the NT were *irregular*. For instance, consider these uses of aorist verbs:

- Lk. 16:4 I know what I intend to do (time = **present**)
- 2 Cor. 11:25 Three times I was beaten (time = **past**)
- John 17:14 the world is going to hate them (time = **future**)
- Eph. 5:29 for no one ever hates his own body (time = **omni-temporal**; always true: past, present and future)
- Lk. 7:35 wisdom is justified by all her children (time = **timeless**; a state of being)

If your rule gets broken this often, the issue is not that Greek writers were sloppy, but that your rule is inadequate.

In the 1990s, Stanley Porter, currently a professor of New Testament at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, noticed that these verb endings we call *tenses* in Greek might be translated more accurately if we did not think of them as being related to time at all.

This issue of how Greek verb tenses work is too vast to address here. You can see a sliver of the debate by turning to the chapter of this book called *Translation Helps*, and look to the section on *Greenwood and the Aorist Tense*.

Coming back to 2:9, I really have no idea why μνημονεύω takes a genitive object in 1:3 and accusative objects here.

τὸν κόπον ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν μόχθον *the toil of us and the drudgery*, or to put it into proper English, *our toil and effort*. There is probably no real difference in the meaning of the words κόπον and μόχθον. Paul sometimes used synonyms in a sentence as a stylistic move, just as we would be doing by saying *She was happy and cheerful*. Probably, using two synonyms rather than just one word makes a statement a bit more emphatic, whether in English or Koine Greek.

As discussed in 2:1, **ἀδελφοί** is best rendered *brothers and sisters*. It is considered a vocative—even though the form is identical to the nominative—because Paul is addressing the believers in Thessalonica directly.

νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας *night and day* is interesting. Both of the nouns are genitives, and are being used in a construction called the *genitive of time*. When you see a genitive of time construction, it indicates *within* or *during* a time period.

Had these nouns been written in the accusative case, **νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν**, it would have been what we call an *accusative of time* construction, and would have indicated a *duration* of time.

- Genitive of time (νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας) = *by night and by day*
- Accusative of time (νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν) = *for a night and a day*

ἐργαζόμενοι *we worked* is a present middle participle, nominative masculine plural, agreeing with the implied subject *we* of the main verb **ἐκηρύξαμεν** *we preached*. This is a similar Participle-MainVerb construction to what we saw in 2:8. The participle is acting very much as though it were a main verb itself.

The difference here in 2:9 is that connecting these verbs with an *and* does not seem natural in English. The PB, GNT, NLT and CEV render them as though they were in two separate sentences: *You remember....* and *We worked....* ESV and NASB keep them in the same sentence, but use a colon to keep them slightly apart from each other.

πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐπιβαρῆσαι τινα ὑμῶν *so as not to be a burden on any of you*. In the NT, **πρὸς τὸ** + an infinitive is a standard way to communicate purpose.

- **πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἀτενίσαι τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ** *so that the children of Israel might not stare* — 2 Cor 3:13
- **Ματθ 6:1: πρὸς τὸ θεαθῆναι** *in order to be seen* — Matt 6:1
- **πρὸς τὸ δύνασθαι** *so as to be able* — Eph 6:11

The verb **ἐπιβαρέω** *to burden* takes its object **τινα** *anyone* in the accusative case. **ὑμῶν** is performing one of its standard functions in expressing *of you*.

εἰς ὑμᾶς *to you*. Paul had a choice here. He could have used the dative plural form of *you* **ὑμῖν**. We would have translated it as *to you* because of that sense being built into the dative. However, Paul elected to use a preposition *for* **to** plus

an accusative pronoun ὑμᾶς, as it accomplishes the same role in the sentence as a dative ὑμῖν would have done.

τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ *the Good News of God*. If you are working your way through 1 Thessalonians from the beginning, you have already figured out how you wish to translate εὐαγγέλιον, and you are at home with θεοῦ of God appearing sometimes with the article and sometimes without.

τὸ εὐαγγέλιον is accusative case because it is the direct object of ἐκηρύξαμεν.

2:10

Both you and God are witnesses of how pure, right, and faultless we were toward you who believe.

Paul is very deliberate, even repetitive, in reminding them of his integrity. Paul appears to think that this will reinforce the validity of the Good News about Jesus.

ὁμεῖς μάρτυρες καὶ ὁ θεός *You and God are witnesses*. The be-verb is left implied. We have yet another equative nominative.

ὥς can be rendered in various ways: *as, like, how, that*. Use your judgement as to how best to render it in your translation.

ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως καὶ ἀμέμπτως *pure, right, and faultless*. It is a bit curious that Paul used three adverbs here with γίνομαι (the main verb) rather than three adjectives. One wants to ferret out some deep theological significance to this—but it could be simply that Paul was using some stylistic variation in his writing.

We normally think it is a good thing in English when somebody finds different ways to express himself, rather than always using the exact same words. Perhaps it was the same in first century Greece.

Determining just what Paul meant by ὁσίως is a little bit difficult, as it is only used in this one place in the NT.

J.B. Lightfoot was one of the foremost New Testament scholars of the 19th century. His extensive knowledge of Classical Greek authors as well as the New Testament makes him an author that people still refer to today.

Based on his reading of Classical authors, he said of ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως,

The two words often occur together and represent *ὁσίως*, one's duty toward God, *δικαίως* one's duty toward men....¹

ἀμέμπως is more comprehensive, including both *ὁσίως* and *δικαίως* contemplated from the negative side.²

ὕμιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν *to you—the ones who believe*. *ὕμιν* is exercising one of the standard roles of dative case nouns and pronouns, which is to express what we render into English with the word *to*. Hence, *to you* or *toward you*. *τοῖς πιστεύουσιν* is dative plural, which agrees with the dative plural *ὕμιν*. The article *τοῖς* is performing one of its standard functions in turning the participle into an adjective that gives information about the *you* of *ὕμιν*. Hence this whole phrase may be rendered *toward you who believe* (PB, NET, GNT).

The article *τοῖς* in front of the *πιστεύουσιν* is performing its magic, turning the participle into an adjectival phrase.

The Greek article *ὁ* can turn verbal forms (like participles) into nouns, adjectival phrases, or adverbial phrases. It is like the magic wand of Ancient Greek grammar. *Vera Verto!*

Hence the verb *πιστεύω* *to believe* morphs into *those who believe*. This is one more demonstration of how different the Greek article *ὁ* is from the English article *the*, and why a mechanical translation of the article into *the* is often a bad idea.

ἐγενήθημεν *we were* is the main verb, although it is the very final word of the verse. This verse is a good example of the enormous flexibility that NT writers used in the word order of their sentences.

Paul's use of the the aorist passive *ἐγενήθημεν* instead of the aorist middle *ἐγενόμεθα* is difficult for us. In English, they both translate the same way: *we were*. We discussed this issue in 2:5 of *ἐγενήθημεν* and *ἐγενόμεθα* being words that Paul would have used interchangeably, with no intended difference in meaning.

¹ . J.B. Lightfoot, *Notes on Epistles of St. Paul from Unpublished Commentaries*. (London: Macmillan, 1895), 27. Of course, Lightfoot

says, *δίκαιος* is often used in differing contexts of righteousness before God.

² Ibid., 28.

2:11

You know very well that we treated each one of you just as a father treats his own children.

In his care for the Thessalonians, Paul compares himself both to a mother and to a father. In this, he is following in the footsteps of OT writers who compare God both to a mother...

- *As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem (Isaiah 66:13, NET).*

and to a father.

- *As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on his faithful followers (Psalm 103:13, NET).*

Paul seems to have understood a father's role to especially include instruction. See the next verse as well as 1 Cor 4:14f. *I am not writing these things to shame you, but to correct you as my dear children. For though you may have 10,000 guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, because I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

καθάπερ οἴδατε *Just as you know.* οἴδατε, from οἶδα, is a verb that has the word endings of a perfect tense verb, but which has a present tense meaning. This is a characteristic of this particular verb—and was discussed in the comments on 2:1 and 2:2.

ὥς ἕνα ἕκαστον ὑμῶν *toward each one of you* is a somewhat idiomatic phrase. There are three other instances in the NT where the phrase ἕνα ἕκαστον is used, all of them written by Luke.

- καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος **ἕνα ἕκαστον** τῶν χρεοφειλετῶν τοῦ κυρίου *So he called his master's debtors **one after another*** Luke 16:5.
- ἐκάθισεν ἐφ' **ἕνα ἕκαστον** αὐτῶν (Tongues of fire) *settled on **each one of** them* Acts 2:3.
- οὐκ ἐπαυσάμην μετὰ δακρύων νοουθετῶν **ἕνα ἕκαστον** *I did not stop teaching **every one of you**, sometimes with tears in my eyes* Acts 20:31.

Given that only Luke and Paul used this phrase, and given the sort of high-end university education they both got, one suspects that this was a phrase used more often by classical authors than in everyday Koine Greek speech.

This hypothesis gets confirmed when we discover that the phrase was uncommon in first century Greek outside of the Bible, but was used by Plato,¹ Isocrates,² and Aristotle.³

Developing more empathy with New Testament writers—for instance, by getting a feel for their writing style—probably does not change our translations much.⁴ We can certainly be very clear about what obedience to Jesus looks like in our everyday lives without any particular empathy with the biblical writers. But it is a benefit to reading Greek that we may have more *fun* reading Scripture.

The conjunction ὥς appears twice in this verse. The first ὥς is difficult for us to translate, but appears to have been included by Paul for the sake of creating a parallel structure:

- The first ὥς introduces how Paul and his companions dealt with each person.
- The second ὥς introduces the comparison to a father's relationship with his children.

ὥς πατὴρ τέκνα ἑαυτοῦ *as a father (is) with his own child*. As discussed in 2:5, normally all verbs are explicitly included in Greek sentences. The only exception is if we are meant to understand it to be some form of the be-verb—either εἰμί or γίνομαι. In this verse, the suggests to us that Paul assumed his readers would understand the 3rd person singular present tense of εἰμί: ἐστί.

ὥς πατὴρ τέκνα by itself would be sufficient to say *as a father is with his children*. By including the genitive reflexive pronoun ἑαυτοῦ, Paul is adding emphasis *as a father is with his very own children*.

¹ *Republic*, Book 4, 433e (Loeb 237, 276).

² *Antidosis*, 15.93 (Loeb 229).

³ *Politics*, 1276b (Loeb 264).

⁴ I say this even as I have the sense that one thing that makes J.B. Phillips' translation

stand out is the extent to which he entered empathetically and imaginatively into the minds of the various writers. So maybe it can make a difference to our translations, even if the difference is subtle.

τέκνα is accusative plural neuter, serving as the object of the implied verb.

2:12

We exhorted, encouraged, and instructed you, that your daily life should be worthy of God, who has called you to share in his kingdom and indeed, in his very own character.

For the sake of good English style, the PB starts a new sentence with this verse. However, in Greek it is part of a long sentence that starts in verse 11. The main verb that governs these participles is οἶδατε ("you know") in verse 11. The participles in this verse give more information about *what* the Thessalonians know. So they function in an adverbial role here.

παρακαλοῦντες ὑμᾶς καὶ παραμυθούμενοι *We exhorted and encouraged you.* According to F.F. Bruce, these two verbs are practically synonymous.¹ Participles can have objects, just as main verbs can. ὑμᾶς is accusative because it is the object of παρακαλοῦντες. *We exhorted you.*

καὶ μαρτυρόμενοι *and testified/urged.* All three of these participles are nominative plural, indicating that they refer back to the implied *We* subject of the verb οἶδατε in 11.

παρακαλοῦντες is an active voice participle from the verb παρακαλέω. While παραμυθούμενοι and μαρτυρόμενοι are listed as middle voice verbs from παραμυθεῖν and μαρτυρεῖν respectively, these are both verbs that lack a proper active voice form. Though technically middle voice verbs, we translate them as though they were in the active voice. This is called deponency, making these deponent verbs.²

¹ Bruce, *Thessalonians*, op. cit., 36.

² The traditional term *deponent* and the concept of *deponency* have been challenged by recent scholarship. See Kmetko, op. cit.

Rodney J. Decker, *Reading Koine Greek: An Introduction and Integrated Workbook* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 227f., suggests that the active voice focuses on the action of the verb: *I hit the ball*. If the verb is in a middle voice, it draws particular attention to, or intensifies the focus on, the subject rather than the action e.g. *I hit the ball*, while the passive portrays the subject as the

recipient of an action by some other agent e.g. *I was hit by the ball*

Decker's ideas fit with what we have seen of Koine Greek using different techniques to capture what we normally handle in English with italics or boldface, and with punctuation marks.

The linguistic debate over the middle voice, while important for Greek grammar as a whole, does not substantially affect the interpretation of Paul's meaning in this passage. Since English lacks a middle voice, it is difficult to capture the nuance of the middle voice in a

εἰς τὸ περιπατεῖν ὑμᾶς *so that your daily walk*. εἰς τὸ *plus an infinitive* is a common way that NT writers talk about purpose. εἰς is usually rendered *to* or *towards*, and indicates direction. περιπατεῖν *to walk* is a verb often used in the NT to describe one's entire way of life. This usage is rooted in OT usage of this verb. For instance,

- *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked* (Psalm 1:1, ESV), referring to a lifestyle that avoids evil influences.
- *And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* (Micah 6:8, ESV), summarizing godly living.

The whole phrase could be translated in a wooden fashion as *toward you living*. But a proper translation would be more along the lines of the PB: *that your daily life* or perhaps *that your whole life*.

ὑμᾶς is accusative since, as in 1:8 and 1:9, it is the subject of the infinitive. When an infinitive has its own subject (rather than sharing the subject of the main verb), that subject must be in the accusative case. This is sometimes called the Accusative-Subject-with-Infinitive

This is different from how English handles infinitive subjects. In English, we might say "God called you to walk..." where "you" appears to be the object of "called" but also the understood subject of "to walk." Greek is more explicit by using the accusative to mark the subject role with the infinitive.

Here's another important point: even though ὑμᾶς follows the infinitive περιπατεῖν in word order, it is functioning as its subject, not its object. We know this because περιπατεῖν is intransitive - one doesn't *walk* a direct object. So the syntax here clearly shows that the Thessalonians (ὑμᾶς) are the ones who are to do the walking/living.

This construction (an article plus an infinitive with accusative subject) is a common way in Greek to express purpose, especially after a preposition like εἰς.

translation.

You can make it a ten-year project to decide how to render middle-voice verbs in a way that captures everything

the biblical writer intended. Downloading Kmetko's thesis will be a good starting place for you.

The whole phrase εἰς τὸ περιπατεῖν ὑμᾶς indicates the goal or purpose of the previous actions (*encouraging, comforting, urging*).

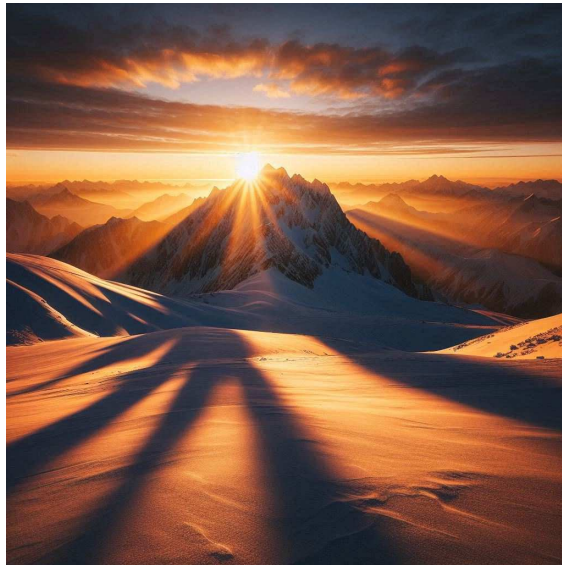
ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ *worthy of God* expresses how they are to live their whole lives. The genitive in this phrase captures the English *of*.

τοῦ καλοῦντος ὑμᾶς *the one who called you*. The article turns the participle into an adjectival phrase modifying θεοῦ. Which God are we talking about? The one who called you. τοῦ καλοῦντος is genitive because it is agreeing with the case of the noun it is modifying, θεοῦ.

ὑμᾶς is accusative, because although τοῦ καλοῦντος is functioning as a sort of adjective, it retains some of its verb-qualities. If a verb is going to take an object, as it does here, *the one who called you*, then that object will typically be in the accusative case.

εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ βασιλείαν καὶ δόξαν *into his very own kingdom and glory*. I find it easy to understand being called into God's kingdom. Jesus fills the gospels with descriptions of the kingdom of God, and what it means to be a part of that.

But the word glory has largely passed out of the English language, except among church people. And even we are not quite sure what the word means. We tend to visualize something like this:



AI-generated image. Public domain.

This is not a bad way to think of glory, but it is hard to see how one can be called into this.¹ Regardless, most English translations render this verse as being called *into his kingdom and glory*.

Since Scripture indicates that glory, whatever it is, is an attribute of God's character, I translated *called into his glory* as meaning that we get included in the life of God—partakers in the divine nature. Paul uses δόξα *glory* in a related way in 2 Cor. 3:18 *In fact, all of us who follow Jesus have faces that reflect the glory of the Lord. And little by little, we are being transformed into the image of Jesus.*

While it does not use the word δόξα, the same theme is developed in Rom. 8:29 *For he had foreknowledge of them, and determined in advance that they would share a family resemblance to his Son, so that he might be the eldest among many brothers and sisters.*

εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν would naturally translate as *into his kingdom*. Adding the word ἑαυτοῦ *of himself* adds emphasis. *Into his own kingdom, or into his very own kingdom.*

The PB exercises some freedom in this verse. You could translate this as *into his very own kingdom....* But I felt like it did not add much emphasis to add *his very own* to *kingdom*. Who else's kingdom is going to be? But to be invited to share in the character of God—this seems momentous to me. So I rendered this as *to share in his very own character*.²

2:13

And so we thank God constantly that when you received the message of God you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as what it is: the very Word of God which is at work in those of you who believe.

Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ ἀδιαλείπτως *And for this reason we are constantly thankful to God.* The first καὶ is a basic conjunction *and*.

¹ To me, this feels a little like certain schools of Hinduism and Buddhism where, when you die, your individuality dissolves and you are absorbed into the Cosmic Consciousness. This is quite a different image than in Christianity, where our individuality endures after death. Indeed, we may become even more truly ourselves

after death, when sin is put to an end, than we were when we were alive on this earth.

² I considered to share in his very own **nature**, but again that felt a little bit too Hindu.

The second καὶ is a good example of how Greek conjunctions can take on other meanings besides *and*. In this case, Paul may have intended it as an *also*. That is, in chapter 1 he indicated several reasons why he was thankful for the Thessalonians. Here he is indicating yet more reasons for thanksgiving.

Another possibility is that the Thessalonians sent a message to Paul via Timothy saying, *We are thankful you brought us the Good News*. To which Paul answers, *And (καὶ) we too (καὶ) are thankful—that you accepted it!*

A common rendering of διὰ when followed by an accusative is *because of, for the sake of*. When followed by τοῦτο *this*, it is often rendered *because of this* or *for this reason*. The PB simply renders Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο as *and so*.

ἡμεῖς εὐχαριστοῦμεν means *we give thanks*. Because of the way Greek verbs package in person and number, Paul could have simply written εὐχαριστοῦμεν and we would have translated it the same way: *as we give thanks*. While it could have been just a stylistic choice of Paul's to include the ἡμεῖς, it may be that he was trying to add emphasis to his sentence, as in *And we too are thankful!!* Or perhaps *And we ourselves are thankful!!*

Greek speakers had not yet invented exclamation points, italics, or bold face. So if Paul wanted to emphasize something, he had to do it with word choice.

τῷ θεῷ *to God*. The dative here is exercising its very common role of providing the indirect object to the verb, which we normally capture with the English word *to*. Hence, *we give thanks to God*.

ἀδιαλείπτως *constantly* is typical of the majority of Greek adverbs, in that it ends with —ως. If you see a word with that ending, be alert to the possibility that it is an adverb.

In many cases, one can take the stem of an adjective and add —ως to create the corresponding adverb. Examples would include:

- ἀληθής *true* → ἀληθῶς *truly*
- δίκαιος *righteous* → δικαίως *righteously*

ὅτι παραλαβόντες λόγον ἀκοῆς παρ' ἡμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ is a little awkward for us to translate. We like to use *to hear/heard* as a verb. Paul has expressed it as a genitive noun. παραλαβόντες is a participle with a time-related flavor, *after*

you heard, when you heard. A wooden translation would be that after you received the word of hearing about/concerning our God.

ἐδέξασθε οὐ λόγον ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ καθὼς ἀληθῶς ἐστὶν λόγον θεοῦ is easy by comparison. *You welcomed (it) not (as the) word of men, but just as it truly is: the word of God.*

ὃς *which* is a masculine nominative singular relative pronoun. That is, it refers back to a noun earlier in the sentence. We expect it to agree with the noun it references, λόγον, and it does—in *gender* (masculine) and *number* (singular). However, its *case* (nominative) is determined by its role in its own clause. In this case, it is the subject of the verb **ἐνεργεῖται** *is working*.

Hence, subject and verb of the clause is *which is working*. Consider these two examples.

- λόγον ὃς ἐνεργεῖται *the word which works...* (ὃς is nominative as subject)
- λόγον ὃν ἔχετε *the word which you have...* (ὃν would be accusative as direct object)

καὶ was likely used by Paul as a way of intensifying what he said about the word of God—that it was *indeed* at work. This is another example of καὶ not being used as a simple conjunction (*and*). The PB and NIV translate the καὶ, while the GNT, NLT, CEV and Phillips treat it as unnecessary to content of this verse in English.

ἐν ὑμῖν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν *in you who believe*. πιστεύουσιν is a dative participle from the verb πιστεύω, *to believe, to have faith*. The dative plural article—which agrees with the dative plural ὑμῖν *you*—turns this verb into a noun—you *who believe*. The article+participle provides additional information about the pronoun ὑμῖν rather than modifying it directly

A wooden translation of this verse might be *And because of this we also give thanks to God unceasingly, because having received word of hearing from us of God, you accepted not word of men but as it truly is, word of God, which also/indeed works in you who believe*. It is your job as a translator to cast this verse into good English style, so that it can be easily understood by a modern reader.

2:14

And your experience, brothers and sisters, paralleled that of the churches of God that are in Judea, in Christ Jesus. For you suffered the same kinds of things from your fellow-countrymen as they did from the Jews.

ὁμεῖς γὰρ μιμηταὶ ἐγενήθητε *For you became imitators.* There is a fairly extensive discussion of the translation issues around ἐγενήθητε in 2:5, the aorist passive form of γίνομαι. Based on all we know of Paul's usage of this word, the best way to translate it into English is as though it was an aorist active verb: *you became/you were* imitators of the churches in Judea.

But this was not a deliberate imitation—they knew of the Judean churches mostly by hearsay—rather, the experience of the Judean churches was reproduced in the Thessalonian church. This was no merely external resemblance. Persecution, according to the NT, is a natural concomitant of Christian faith, and for the believers in Thessalonica to undergo suffering for Christ's sake proves that they are fellow-members of the same body as the Judean churches.¹

We have the equative-nominative structure that is so common in Greek: nominative—be-verb—nominative ὁμεῖς ἐγενήθητε μιμηταί. You ≈ imitators. Those of us who are native English speakers—where word order plays such a big role in determining meaning—would prefer it if Greek writers did not exercise such freedom in sequencing their words. But we have to adjust if we are to read Greek.

By this time you should be getting experienced at translating **ἀδελφοί** as *brothers and sisters*.²

τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ *of the churches of God.* This is an ordinary use of the genitive case: *of the churches of God*.

τῶν οὐσῶν *those which are* is a participle which has been converted, by the use of the article, into an adjective that describes the church. Because τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν is a genitive plural, the adjective that modifies it is also a genitive plural.

¹ Bruce, *Thessalonians*, op. cit, 45.

² See 1:4.

We have two genitives preceding τῶν οὐσῶν: τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν and τοῦ θεοῦ. It is the agreement in number (i.e. plural) that lets us know that τῶν οὐσῶν is describing the church ἐκκλησιῶν rather than God θεοῦ. Had Paul used a singular τοῦ ὄντος rather than the plural τῶν οὐσῶν, it would have indicated he was giving us information about God, not the church.

Adjectives agree in number, case, and gender with the nouns they modify.

τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τῶν οὐσῶν could be rendered woodenly as *the churches—the ones who are....* Of course, a more fluent translation would be *the churches that are etc.*

ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ *in Judea, in Christ* uses the most common translation of ἐν followed by¹ a dative noun: *in Judea, in Christ*. As we have seen with the word for God, θεός, proper names can appear either with or without the article, and its presence or absence is untranslatable. We translate τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ simply as *Judea*.

Ἰησοῦ looks like a genitive noun, which would mean it was not agreeing with the dative Χριστῷ. However, the Greek word for Jesus is one of a small set of nouns that is the same in the dative, genitive and vocative.

Nominative	Ἰησοῦς
Genitive	Ἰησοῦ
Dative	Ἰησοῦ
Accusative	Ἰησοῦν
Vocative	Ἰησοῦ

ὅτι τὰ αὐτὰ ἐπάθετε καὶ ὑμεῖς *For the same (things) you suffered—even you.*

You are probably familiar with αὐτός/αὐτή/αὐτό being rendered as he/she/it or as he himself/she herself/itself. When preceded by an article, it can mean *the same*.²

In this verse, τὰ αὐτὰ is a plural accusative case, because it is the direct object of the verb ἐπάθετε, hence *You suffered the same things.*

¹ As it invariably is.

² BDAG s.v. "αὐτός" 3

Paul's use of καὶ is almost untranslatable here. καὶ is serving not so much as a conjunction as an intensifier for the word ὑμεῖς, the nominative plural form that is the subject of the verb ἐπάθετε.

In this instance, καὶ is highlighting the similarity of experience between the Judean churches and the Thessalonian believers.

Grammatically, it's creating a precise parallel: just as the Judean churches suffered from their own people, so too the Thessalonians suffered from their own countrymen. The καί here isn't merely connecting two things, but underlining their equivalence. But as I say, this is difficult to render into English.

ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων συμφυλετῶν *by/from your own countrymen*. ὑπὸ will be rendered differently, depending on whether it is followed by a genitive or accusative. When followed by a genitive, as here, we render it with something like *by* in English.

The article in Greek, you are learning, does many things. While it can mean the in many contexts, in other places it will serve as his/hers/its. So also here your countrymen.

καθὼς καὶ αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων *just as they (suffered) by/from the Jews*. αὐτοὶ is appearing here without the article, and so is easily rendered as *they*. We have Paul again using καὶ as an intensifier, and as a way of emphasizing the parallelism between the experience of the Thessalonian believers and their fellow believers back in Israel.

τῶν Ἰουδαίων could be rendered either as *the Jews* or *by the Judeans*. By this time, however, after his recent problems with Jews stirring up riots in Philippi and Thessalonica, it is likely that Paul was considering all of the Jews as a single group that opposed anything to do with Jesus.

It was only 12 years after the writing of this letter that James, the brother of Jesus and a key leader in the Jerusalem church, was killed.¹

Partly as a result of this, and partly as a result of growing tensions with the Zealots, who would bring down the wrath of the Roman army upon

¹ Josephus, Flavius, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Translated by William Whiston (Chicago:

The John C. Winston Company, 1936), 20.197-203.

themselves in A.D. 67, the Christians largely evacuated from Palestine in the mid-60s.¹

It seems that by A.D. 50, when this letter was being written, that the break between church and synagogue was already well under way, and *the Jews* as a group were being seen as opponents of Jesus. So it is that Paul, while ethnically Jewish, might not have considered himself *one of the Jews*.

NET Bible makes an interesting effort to render the καὶ with *as they in fact did from the Jews*. The words *in fact* do serve to intensify the sentence a bit in English.

2:15

After having killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, they persecuted us. They are opposed not only to God but against all people as well.

While the PB, NLT and CEV all start this verse off with a new sentence, there is no active verb, just participles. This verse is the middle section of a long sentence that begins in verse 14, and which contains the main verb ἐγενήθητε *you became/were*, and finishes at the end of verse 16.

All of the participles are genitive plurals, which brings them into agreement with τῶν Ἰουδαίων at the end of 2:14. So the Jews are **τῶν καὶ τὸν κύριον ἀποκτεινάντων Ἰησοῦν** *those who killed the Lord Jesus*. The word order is striking, even for Greek, with Ἰησοῦν placed after both τὸν κύριον and the participle. It is very likely that Paul was seeking to create emphasis through this positioning . τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν is all accusative as it is the direct object of the participle.

If the word order is odd in separating the words τὸν κύριον and Ἰησοῦν with a participle, it is doubly odd in inserting καὶ between the article τῶν and its participle ἀποκτεινάντων. We would normally expect it ahead of the participle phrase, as καὶ τῶν ἀποκτεινάντων. While it is difficult to render into English, Paul uses καὶ five times in this verse as, so I suppose, a tool for linking together ideas.

¹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.5.3. (Loeb 153)

It was this exodus from Palestine that accounts for the Apostle John

composing his gospel account of the life of Jesus while living in Ephesus.

καὶ τοὺς προφῆτας *and the prophets*. More accusatives here, making this also a part of the direct object of the participle. The Jews not only killed the Lord Jesus but **καὶ τοὺς προφῆτας**. Based on what we read in Rom. 1:2, 3:21, and 11:3, it is likely that Paul was speaking of OT prophets here rather than Christian prophets.

καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων *and persecuted us*.

καὶ θεῷ μὴ ἀρεσκόντων *They do not seek to be pleasing to God*. **καὶ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ἐναντίων** *and they (are) opposed to all people*.

The fable by Aesop of the dog in the manger seems to describe the situation.

A Dog was lying in a Manger full of hay. An Ox, being hungry, came near and was going to eat of the hay. The Dog, getting up and snarling at him, would not let him touch it. *Surly creature*, said the Ox, *you cannot eat the hay yourself, and yet you will let no one else have any*.¹

2:16

By hindering us from speaking to various people groups so that they might be saved, they are continually stockpiling their sins. But the wrath of God will come upon them in the end.

κωλύόντων ἡμᾶς *By hindering us*. **κωλύόντων** is a participle, telling us that as far as Paul was concerned, this was part of the same sentence he started in 2:14, where he uses the MainVerb-Participle-Participle-etc. construction. But for the sake of good English style, the PB starts a new sentence here. **ἡμᾶς** is the direct object of the participle, and so Paul wrote it in the accusative case.

τοῖς ἔθνεσιν λαλῆσαι *from speaking to various people groups*. It is common for the dative to capture what we express in English with the indirect object word *to*. Bob threw the ball *to Debbie*. The name Debbie would be in the dative case. So here, the plural of ἔθνος is in the dative case.

ἔθνος (the root of the English word *ethnic*), in the Bible typically connotes *everybody except the Jews*, is a word I struggle to render. *Gentile* is what virtually

¹ Aesop, "The Dog in the Manger", *Aesop's Fables*, translated by George Fyler

Townsend, (Morton Grove, IL: A. Whitman & Co., 1925).

every published translation uses. But it is not a word that is used in 21st century North American English except by Jews and church people.

Up until recently, all we had to go on to know how many people attended church regularly (defined as 3 Sundays out of 4) was what they self-reported to surveys.

However, almost 100% of us now carry a tracking device with us everywhere we go—our cellphones. Dr. Devin G. Pope of the University of Chicago was able to gain access to cellphone tracking data for several months for 2.1 million people. From this, he could tell if people were at home in bed, at the lake fishing, or in church on Sunday. He published a study in April of 2024 indicating that only 5% of Americans attended church regularly. This figure is significantly lower than the 22% reported in traditional surveys based on self-reported data.¹

Given that 2.4% of Americans are Jewish, it means that most likely, if you use the word *Gentile* in the United States, only 7.4% of potential readers of your translation will understand it. 92.6% are neither Jewish nor regular church attenders.

The number of people who will not track with your translation rises to 98% in Canada, which has a smaller portion of the population who are Jewish, and where Christianity's impact is even more marginal than in the US.²

Here, I render ἔθνος as *various people groups*. Depending on the context elsewhere in the NT, I translate it as *unbelievers*, *the pagans*, *people groups* or *other ethnic groups*. If you use *Gentile* in your translation, you will have the

¹ Pope, Devin G., "Religious Worship Attendance in America: Evidence from Cellphone Data", *NBER Working Paper No. 32334*, National Bureau of Economic Research, April 2024
<https://www.nber.org/papers/w32334>.

A visitor can download up to three PDF files a year from this site. Scroll down and you will find a button you can click to download this paper.

² Hayatullah Amanat, "Canadians Finding Faith as Americans Lose It: Survey on Importance of Religion", CTV News,

December 16, 2022

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/lifestyle/canadians-finding-faith-as-americans-lose-it-survey-on-importance-of-religion-1.6198463>.

Spiritual interest seems to be on the rise in Canada, but church is not where people are going to feed that interest.

I am assuming the same sort of gap between self-reporting and actual behavior would be found in Canada if you could do the sort of cellphone study as Pope did in America.

tacit approval of hundreds of the world's top Bible scholars, even if 98% of the readers of your version may not know who you are talking about.

A wooden translation would be *hindering us to speak....* A better way to render this in proper English is *hindering us from speaking*.

ἵνα σωθῶσιν *so that they might be saved*.

σωθῶσιν is a good word to remind us of the difference between active and passive voice. If Paul wanted to say that he shared the Gospel *so that God might save them*, he would use the 3rd person aorist **active** subjunctive singular of σῶζω, ἵνα ὁ Θεὸς σώσῃ αὐτούς. *So that God might save them*. If God is doing the saving, and God is the nominative case subject of the verb, then the verb will be expressed with in an active voice.

In this case, however, God is still the one doing the saving, but grammatically, it is *the Gentiles* who are the implied subject, so the passive voice is used *so that they might be saved* (i.e. by God).

The subjunctive is used in the verb σωθῶσιν and indicates that salvation is viewed as a possibility or intended outcome rather than a guaranteed result. In English, we would render an indicative form of σῶζω as *so they were saved*, as a definite, factual thing that happened. The subjunctive we render as *so they might be saved*.

εἰς τὸ ἀναπληρῶσαι αὐτῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας πάντοτε, woodenly *to the making complete of their the sins always*. In proper English, *they always heap up their sins to the limit* (NIV). εἰς + an article + an infinitive is a common technique used in the NT to express result or purpose.¹ In this case, the result of their action (of hindering the preaching of the Good News) is that they keep piling up sins for themselves.

The article in τὸ ἀναπληρῶσαι makes the infinitive a verbal noun, but it still has verb-characteristics. It can take a plural accusative τὰς ἁμαρτίας as a direct object. This is a challenging phrase to translate.

¹ C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 127.

ἔφθασεν δὲ ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος *But the wrath [of God] will come upon them in the end.* With ἔφθασεν being a main verb (aorist active indicative) we finally begin a new sentence. Had Paul been using punctuation marks, he almost surely would have put a period after the word immediately before ἔφθασεν: πάντοτε.

It is not just the presence of an indicative verb that flags a new sentence. δὲ always appears as the second word in a sentence. So this tells us that Paul was thinking of this as a new sentence, even though the person who set up the verse divisions¹ we use today failed to make a break between verses at the δὲ.

ἡ ὀργὴ was written in the nominative case, and so was intended by Paul to be the subject of the verb ἔφθασεν.

There are several instances in 1 Thessalonians where, as here, we see a preposition dropping its final letter where the next word starts with a vowel. Hence, ἐπὶ αὐτοὺς becomes ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς, *upon them*.

Rendering the aorist verb φθάνω is going to involve a judgement call on your part. (There is a discussion of the aorist tense in the chapter below called *Translation Helps >> Greenwood and the Aorist Tense*.)

The aorist refers to completed action—which is of course often going to be action that occurs in past time. However, the idea of completion, also called aspect, can sometimes overwhelm the time-related component of the aorist tense.

Most published versions render this verse as though the action of the verb *did* occur in past time. The GNT is typical: *And now God's anger has at last come down on them!*

However, my read of the context, with these people storing up their sins, suggests to me that these people have not yet experienced the *consequences* of their sinful choices. Humanly speaking, these people in Philippi and

¹ Robert Estienne, a scholar from Paris who was the Royal Typographer (i.e. the King's printer) published a Greek and Latin New Testament in 1551 which included the standard numbered verses we use today.

According to his son, he worked out these verse divisions while on horseback during a one-week trip from

Lyon to Paris.

Peter J. Williams, "Where Did Verse Numbers Come From?", Tyndale House, 2018, <https://tyndalehouse.com/explore/articles/chapter-and-verse/>.

Thessalonica who oppose the Gospel are still doing quite well in life. They are enjoying what the psalmist might call *the prosperity of the wicked*.

I made a call for my own translation to render εἰς τέλος as *in the end*, assuming that Paul was looking ahead to the yet-to-come, final judgement, using an aorist tense in the verb because he viewed *the end* as one, complete thing, even though time-wise, it was still in the future.

Looking at the context not just of this verse, but of the broader context of the rest of this letter, we will find that Paul has the end of time very much in view. Chapters 4 and 5 contain echoes of Matthew 24¹. And verse 13 of chapter 24 says ὁ δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος οὗτος σωθήσεται. *But the one who holds out to **the end** will be saved.*

Consequently, I have rendered ἔφθασεν using an English future tense.

However, if you look at:

[https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/1 Thessalonians 2:16](https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/1%20Thessalonians%202:16)

...you will see I am very much in the minority here. The people who stand behind these translations are outstanding scholars. If you are uncertain of how to render this yourself, you should probably follow their example rather than mine.

2:17

Brothers and sisters, we were separated from you for a short time—physically, but not in our thoughts. So with a longing in our hearts, we tried very hard to connect with you in person.

Ἡμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, ἀπορφανισθέντες ἀφ' ὑμῶν *But we, brothers [and sisters] have been separated from you.* ἀπορφανισθέντες is an interesting word. A passive nominative plural participle—*being separated*—it is clearly connected to the nominative plural noun that is the subject of the sentence, ἡμεῖς. It is best

¹ Enough so to convince me that Paul had a copy of Matthew at his elbow as he wrote this epistle.

rendered into English as though it was a regular indicative verb—we *were separated*.

It is a compound, formed from ἀπό + ὀρφανίζω (the noun form of this verb, ὀρφανός, is the root of our English word *orphan*), and is a deeply emotional word. Though found only here in the NT, it has been found on stone inscriptions to express bereavement over the death of a child.¹

It is a challenge to render this phrase concisely in a way that captures the emotional flavor Paul was seeking to express. My instinct is that the Thessalonians would have understood Paul to be saying *Having to leave you so suddenly was as heartbreaking as the unexpected death of a child*. The PB rendering stays a bit closer to the wording in Greek,² but probably does not give my reader an adequate feel for the emotional response of the Thessalonian believers when they first read this.

We have seen the character changes of ἀφ' ὑμῶν before. Where the next word starts with a vowel, ἀπό becomes ἀπ'. If that vowel has a rough breathing mark ἀπ' becomes ἀφ'.

πρὸς καιρὸν ὥρας *for the time of an hour* is an idiom that means *for a short time*. Paul himself had not reconnected yet with these believers, of course, but Timothy had. The sequence of events seems to have been:

1. Paul, Silas, and Timothy founded the church in Thessalonica but had to leave abruptly due to persecution.
2. Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on and encourage the new believers.
3. Timothy returned to Paul in Corinth with a positive report about the Thessalonian church.
4. Upon hearing this report, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians as a letter of encouragement to the believers there.

προσώπῳ οὐ καρδίᾳ *in face not in heart*. It was a common Greek idiom to speak of being in the presence of a person as being *before his face*.

¹ *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, vol. 46, 1922, p. 345 (no author indicated).

² I do not want the readers of this commentary to say, Child? WHAT child?

There is no Greek word in this verse meaning 'child'. How does Goethe come up with this stuff??

- πρὸ προσώπου σου into your presence—Mark 1:2
- κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν in the presence of every possible ethnic group—Luke 2:31
- κατὰ πρόσωπον Πιλάτου in the presence of Pilate—Acts 3:13

It would have been very understandable for Paul to use the prepositional phrases ἐν προσώπῳ and ἐν καρδίᾳ. But since the preposition ἐν is always followed by a dative—which means the translation of ἐν does not change with the case of the noun that follows it—biblical writers often just use dative nouns and leave the ἐν assumed.

So then a wooden translation of this phrase would be *in face, not in heart*. However, it is a bit idiomatic. A better rendering would be that we were separated *physically, but not in our thoughts, physically, but not in our hearts or physically, but not emotionally*.

In Hebrew thinking the heart was considered to be the seat of the intellect and the center of the whole personality, not primarily the seat of the emotions.¹

Although Paul's time in Thessalonica was short, he really bonded with the people there.

περισσότερως ἐσπουδάσαμεν *We tried very hard*. Think about these three sentences: 1. Alice tried hard. 2. Bill tried harder. 3. Charlotte tried hardest. *Harder* is considered a comparative. *Hardest* is considered a superlative.

The word περισσότερως is formed in Greek as a comparative. However, as the Greek language evolved between 450 B.C. and A.D. 50, people started using comparatives and superlatives without any intent to compare degrees among different people.² They used comparatives as an intensifier: *very hard*.

The ESV *the more eagerly* and RSV *the more eagerly* try to render this word as a comparative, and make us want to ask *more than who?* They are a bit misleading, as they are trying to interpret this word as though Paul was writing in the 5th century B.C. rather than the 1st century A.D.

¹ Nida and Ellingworth, op.cit., 48.

² Jay C. Treat, "Differences between Classical Greek and Koiné Greek", *Center for Computer Analysis of Texts, University of*

Pennsylvania, 2019, <https://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~jtreat/koine/classical.html>.

τὸ πρόσωπον ὑμῶν ἰδεῖν. A wooden translation of this would be *to see your face*, where τὸ πρόσωπον is the accusative direct object of the infinitive ἰδεῖν, and ὑμῶν is genitive expresses possession, *your face*. But we have seen earlier in this same verse that the word *face* can be a bit idiomatic, and here probably means *to see you in person*.

ἐν πολλῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ *in or with great desire*. The PB reverses the order of the sentence, putting the desire at the beginning, followed by the action.

2:18

For we wanted to come visit you. Several times I—Paul—tried, but Satan prevented us from doing so.

διότι ἠθελήσαμεν ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς *For we wanted to come to you*. διότι is often considered a bit stronger version of *for* or *because* than γὰρ, giving a reason for what has just been said. But that is certainly not the case in this verse, as the reason Paul gives for trying hard to visit them was that he *wanted to do so*. This is little more than a restatement of what he said in verse 17.

That ἠθελήσαμεν is followed by an infinitive is something we would expect. It is enormously common in the NT for the verb θέλω, as by its nature it requires completion by an infinitive. θέλω *I want* is incomplete without expressing *what* is wanted.

As with many prepositions, you ought not begin translating πρὸς until you check the case of the noun or pronoun that follows it. ὑμᾶς is in the accusative case, so the most appropriate way to render πρὸς ὑμᾶς is *to you*.

ἐγὼ μὲν Παῦλος καὶ ἅπαξ καὶ δὶς *I Paul and once and twice*. Up to now, Paul has been writing on behalf of himself, Silas and Timothy. But in this verse, he shifts back into first person singular. He has been wanting to return to Thessalonica for a visit himself (Timothy, of course, has already been back once).

While καὶ is often rendered as *and*, Paul used Greek conjunctions with great flexibility. One could better render this phrase as **not only once but twice**.

However, F.F. Bruce cites evidence indicating that Paul was using an idiomatic expression here to mean *more than once*.¹

μὲν is interesting in this sentence. It often sets up a contrast with a **δέ** introducing the contrasted phrase. So what we expect is *I μὲν tried to visit you repeatedly while δέ Timothy and Silas....* Except that there is no contrast in this verse. Timothy and Silas were also emotionally attached to the believers in Thessalonica, and also wanted to visit. There is no English equivalent for a **μὲν** sitting there all by itself in a sentence, so we must leave it untranslated.

καὶ ἐνέκοψεν ἡμᾶς ὁ Σατανᾶς but *Satan hindered us*. Once again we see the flexibility that Greek offered the conjunction **καὶ**. In this context, it is clear that the appropriate rendering into English is not *and* but is rather *but*.

In this phrase, *Satan* is the subject, and so is in the nominative case. That it is at the end of the phrase is of no consequence. The case tells us the function of this word in the sentence. *Us* is the object of the verb *hindered*. So Satan hindered who or what? He hindered us.

Just how he did so is not stated. What is clear is that Paul felt that Satan was a personal being who was able to put obstacles in the way of believers. However, they were able to send Timothy from Athens, and in 3:11 Paul expresses his confidence that God would overcome Satan's efforts.

The tendency among Christians is often either to discount the activity of Satan altogether, or to attribute power to Satan that is *almost* equivalent to God's.

If you are sailing through Active Pass in British Columbia, Canada, between the islands of Galiano and Mayne, and you touch bottom on the starboard side of the pass, the solution is not to run hard aground to port. Rather it is to keep a chart in hand and steer for the deep water channel, whichever way it may lead.

So also, we should keep a copy of the Bible in hand and follow wherever Jesus leads us. What you are doing now, translating a biblical book, is an excellent strategy. Preachers almost inevitably base their sermons on a verse here and a verse there. Translating your way through a biblical book will put you in touch

¹ F.F. Bruce, *Thessalonians*, op. cit., 55.

with the context of verses in a way that is uniquely helpful. You can model your perspective on that of Jesus, or Paul, or whoever you are reading.

2:19

For what will be our hope, joy, and evidence of proud achievement in the presence of the Lord Jesus at his return if not you?

The church I attend emphasizes on an almost weekly basis that there is nothing we can do that is not infected by sin...nothing in our lives we can be *proud* of. We are utterly dependent on Jesus' death and resurrection to enable us to come before God. There is a lot of truth in this, of course. Sin has infected all of creation, and our hope is rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

But it is good to let our Bible reading shape our theology, rather than the other way about. Here, Paul is saying that the people in whose lives he has played a role, evangelizing and mentoring them, are something of which he can be justly proud when Jesus returns.

While it is definitely true that the normal marks of greatness in this world—wealth, fame, education—do not mean much to God, it is not entirely true to say that we have nothing to bring to Jesus. Paul is saying that what he has done among the Thessalonians is of genuine and eternal value,¹ and that he feels happy and proud as he reflects on this.

Paul uses language similar to this in 1 Cor 9:2, where he says that those he has mentored are the proof of his apostleship, and in Phil 4:1, where he speaks of his people (and he does consider them *his people*) as his joy and crown.

Τίς γὰρ ἡμῶν ἐλπίς ἢ χαρὰ ἢ στέφανος καυχήσεως *For what (will be) our hope, joy, and crown of pride?* As in many verses in the NT, the be-verb is implied.

Happily, in most cases where the verb is implied, we can assume that the author intended some form of the verb *to be*.

It is up to you as a translator to decide from the context whether to cast it as a present tense (*what **is** our hope...*) or as a future tense (*what **will be** our hope...*).

¹ See also Kittel, *TDNT*, op. cit., vol. 7, 630.

I shall leave it to you to pursue the importance of *hope* and *joy* in Paul's writings. From a translator's immediate perspective, the short word ἥ is the bigger problem.

ἥ is typically translated as *or* in the NT. However, in this particular type of sentence,¹ it functions as an *and*.

If you wish, you can follow the footnotes and analyze the grammatical features of this particular verse, but **it is unreasonable for you to try a memorize an obscure scenario such as this** for ἥ.

What you *can* do is to keep in mind that all of the conjunctions, ἥ, καί, δέ, etc., had a range of meanings. The original readers (or hearers) would have sorted out what the speaker had in mind by listening for the context in which the words occurred. We can, and must, do the same.

There is a terrific article about this particular word in this exact verse by Bill Mounce, one of the world's leading Greek scholars, where he develops this very idea.

*Can or mean and? (1 Thess 2:19)*²

Mounce served as the New Testament Chair of the ESV translation committee, and is currently serving on the NIV translation committee. This short article is well worth reading.³

Most often, the accents in Greek help you get the rhythm right when you read it aloud. This in turn will be a huge help to you if you ever start to memorize

¹ Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), §446.

So also Robertson, A. T., *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1923), §1188f, and Wanamaker, op. cit., 124.

² Bill Mounce, "Can 'or' mean 'and'? (1 Thess 2:19)", *Monday With Mounce* blog,

January 31, 2015, <https://www.billmounce.com/monday-with-mounce/can-“or”-mean-“and”-1-thess-2-19>.

³ Actually, it is enormously worthwhile to browse through all of Mounce's (several hundred!) blogs at: <https://www.billmounce.com/blogs/monday-with-mounce>.

verses in Greek. But as a general rule, you can ignore the accents and you will still understand the word just fine. This verse contains an exception to this rule.

τίς is an interrogative, meaning—depending on the context—who?, what? or which one? τίς on the other hand, means someone, anyone, something, or anything.¹

γὰρ is in its accustomed place, as the second word in the sentence. In the previous verse, we observed the synonym διότι which, if it occurs, will be the first word of the sentence or phrase. There is no difference in meaning between these two words in these two verses. Paul chose them for stylistic reasons of his own.

ἡμῶν is genitive, and is performing one of the key roles of the genitive case—to indicate possession. *Our hope....* Genitives also express what we often capture in English with the words *of* or *from*. If you find it easier to remember, you can think of this phrase as *hope of us....*

A clear instance of the use of genitive to express the English *of* can be found in this verse, where the noun στέφανος *crown* is modified by the genitive καυχήσεως *of boasting*. Crowns, typically made from greenery rather than metal and associated with various sorts of honors, would have been very familiar to Paul's readers.

Pausanias, writing in the 2nd century A.D., writes about the rewards given to victors in the Olympic Games.

*The prize for a victor at Olympia is an olive-wreath cut from the wild-olive tree behind the temple of Zeus.*²

Livy, writing early in the 1st century A.D., speaks of the use of crowns as military honors.

*The oak crown, which he had deserved by saving the lives of Roman citizens, he proudly displayed.*³

¹ Of course, Paul was writing without any accents at all.

The difference between τίς and τις goes back a thousand years, when people were still speaking a Greek that was related to first-century Koine, but who felt that they could make it easier for their

readers by adding accent marks to the text.

² Pausanias, op. cit., 5.15.3.

³ Livy, *History of Rome*, 4.20 (Loeb 133).

In this context, Paul is talking rewards or honor that he will receive from God in heaven.

Crown of boasting is not natural sounding English.¹ I pondered how best to communicate στέφανος² καυχήσεως to a modern reader. Options I toyed with include:

- Badge of Honor
- Source of Pride
- Trophy of Success
- Crowning Glory—this phrase has the advantage of still using the word *crown* but in a way more readily understood in modern English.
- Ultimate Reward

I settled on *evidence of proud achievement* since that seems close to the notion of στέφανος καυχήσεως, and can be distinguished, at least slightly, from the act of speaking boastfully—which is something Paul takes a dim view of. See Rom. 3:27.

ἢ οὐχὶ καὶ ὑμεῖς is a parenthetical phrase, *if not you*.

In the phrase ἐλπίς ἢ χαρὰ ἢ στέφανος καυχήσεως, ἢ functions like the English word *or*. But in the following phrase ἢ οὐχὶ καὶ ὑμεῖς the word demonstrates its versatility in Greek, as it introduces a rhetorical question—or really, a question within a larger question.

As we have seen elsewhere in this book, καὶ can function less like a conjunction and more like an intensifier, *if not indeed* you. Or maybe it serves the way punctuation marks would in modern English, *if not you!?!*

ἔμπροσθεν *in front of/in the presence of* τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ *our Lord Jesus*. ἔμπροσθεν is a preposition that is always followed by a genitive. τοῦ κυρίου is genitive. Ἰησοῦ agrees with κυρίου, and is also genitive. ἡμῶν is genitive, but it

¹ And culturally, crowns of any sort are not commonly worn in the adult world. When you see them today, they are most commonly seen on 5 year old girls dressed as princesses.

² You may have noticed that στέφανος *crown* is exactly the same word as the name

Στέφανος *Stephen*. This is a name that would have carried these prestigious connotations. Parents naming their child Stephanos would have been associating their child with ideas of victory, honor, and achievement.

is because it is expressing possession—**our** *Lord Jesus*—rather than for any reason connected with the preposition.

ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ παρουσίᾳ *at his return*. ἐν is always followed by dative nouns/pronouns/prepositions, and is often rendered as *in*. However, in this context it is more natural to render it as *at* or *at the time of*. As with conjunctions, prepositions can have many uses, and you must do your best to sort out the best rendering in a given context. The BDAG lexicon introduces its 5 pages of small print on ἐν by saying:

The uses of this prep. are so many and various, and oft. so easily confused, that a strictly systematic treatment is impossible.... The earliest listeners/readers, not being inconvenienced by grammatical and lexical debates, would readily absorb the context and experience little difficulty.

παρουσία is a word that was used in Classical and Koine Greek to denote *the presence of a (pagan) god in a temple or a sacred meal, or to his appearance in a vision*,¹ or to the *arrival* of a royal or official person, or of the *visit* of some official person.²

It is a word that was used four times, however, in Matthew 24 to specifically refer to the return of Jesus. Paul adopted this specialized use of the word, and employed it four times in this letter, and another three times in the second letter to Thessalonica.

As we observe Paul's use of this word in this book, we will get a sense of all that it implied to him. From this verse, we see that Paul understood that at the παρουσία, he would find himself in the presence of Jesus...and that he would have an opportunity to be proud of the people whom he had mentored in the faith.

This is the second instance in this book where Paul has used language that reminds us of of Matthew 24.

- εἰς τέλος *the end* in 2:16
- τῇ αὐτοῦ παρουσίᾳ *his return* in 2:19.

¹ Nida, op. cit., 50.

² See LSJ lexicon on παρουσία.

By themselves, these are not much. But hold them in mind as your translation of 1 Thessalonians takes shape. You may slowly acquire, as I did, a sense that Paul had a copy of Matthew at his elbow as he composed this letter.

2:20

For you yourselves are our pride and joy.

Ὑμεῖς γὰρ ἐστε ἡ δόξα ἡμῶν καὶ ἡ χαρά *For you yourselves are our pride and joy.* This is a typical equative-nominative construction, with a nominative plural subject ὑμεῖς *You* followed by a be verb ἐστε *you are* followed by a pair of pair of nominative-case nouns, δόξα *glory* and χαρά *joy*. These nominative nouns after the verb describe some aspects of the grammatical subject of the sentence.

Hard-wired into the verb ἐστε is the plural *you*. The sentence would translate exactly the same if Paul had written it as γὰρ ἐστε ἡ δόξα ἡμῶν καὶ ἡ χαρά.

Including the ὑμεῖς at the front was likely a way Paul chose to add emphasis to his sentence: *For you are our glory and joy!* Or perhaps *For you yourselves are our glory and joy.*

In 2:12, I discuss the issue of translating δόξα *glory*—a word that is used so uncommonly today that most people are a bit fuzzy on its meaning. But as I read 2:12 and compare it to 2:20, I get the feeling that the word δόξα is being used with a slightly different connotation.

This particular verse is a good one to remind us that *the fundamental unit of meaning* in Koine Greek—as in human language generally—is *not the word, nor even the sentence, but the paragraph.*

In this paragraph, which includes verse 19, Paul is talking about things that will happen at the time that Jesus returns. He is also talking about the things that will make him proud, and will in turn make God proud of him, when that happens.

In 2:12, it appears that Paul is talking about sharing in the character of God. Here, however, he appears to be talking about the kind of reward that he hopes and expects to get at the return of Jesus, and about how proud he is of the people he has mentored. It seems related to the use of δόξα in Classical Greek literature to refer to fame or reputation.

Authors that used δόξα in this fashion include:

- Homer in *The Odyssey*, (8th century B.C.)¹
- Solon (6th century B.C.)²
- Plato (4th century B.C.)³
- Aristotle (who was Plato's student, and who subsequently became the tutor of Alexander the Great, 4th century B.C.)⁴

Paul's education, first in Tarsus and then in Jerusalem, was broad enough that he sometimes used words in a way reminiscent of Classical writers, and sometimes in ways reminiscent of the LXX.

Hence, in this verse, I translated ἡ δόξα ἡμῶν καὶ ἡ χαρά as *our pride and joy*.

Probably both of these words are connected to his *crown of boasting* in 2:19.

¹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 11.344 (Loeb 104)

² West, Martin Litchfield, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum cantati*, 2nd ed. Vol. 2. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), Fragment 13.

Solon is not very well known today, but he was an influential Athenian statesman, lawmaker, political

philosopher, and poet who played a crucial role in shaping ancient Greek society and politics.

³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 454d-e (Loeb 166).

⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1145b (Loeb 73).

Chapter 3

3:1

Consequently, when we could stand it no longer, we decided to remain in Athens alone

Διὸ μηκέτι στέγοντες *Therefore, when we could bear it no longer*, διὸ is less common than οὖν, but there is no significant difference between them. Of course, οὖν always comes second in a sentence or phrase, while διὸ comes first. This, however, is merely a difference of syntax. In meaning, they are equivalent. Paul is going to discuss the action he took as a result of his feelings of attachment to the Thessalonian believers.

When to employ capitalization of words in a Greek New Testament is the editor's choice. The SBLGNT capitalizes the first character of a word that starts a new paragraph, as here. It also capitalizes proper nouns, like *Athens* and *Timothy*. God, when referring to the one true God, is treated in English as a proper noun, and is capitalized. In the SBLGNT, however, θεός is left in all-lowercase letters. In the original document, of course, everything was written in all-uppercase letters.

The participle is nominative plural, which tells us that it refers to the subject *we*.

εὐδοκήσαμεν καταλειφθῆναι ἐν Ἀθήναις μόνοι *we thought well to be left behind in Athens alone*. While καταλειφθῆναι is a passive infinitive *to be left behind*. Passive voice verbs indicate that the person who does the action is not performed by the grammatical subject of the verb. Paul and Silas (the *we* that is the subject of the sentence) were the ones being left behind. Timothy was the one doing the leaving-behind.

That said, since the next verb is an active voice *we sent Timothy*, the passive voice infinitive καταλειφθῆναι is more naturally rendered into English as an active voice *We remained behind*.

ἐν Ἀθήναις is a typical use of the preposition ἐν, which is always followed by a dative noun or pronoun. In this case, the dative noun is Ἀθήναις. While it may

seem odd that Ἀθήναις is a dative *plural*, it is the case that many city names were expressed in a plural form. Ἱεροσόλυμα, for instance, is a neuter plural word referring to *Jerusalem*.¹

μόνοι is a nominative plural adjective, which indicates that it refers back to the subject of the sentence, *we*.

3:2

and sent our brother and God's coworker in spreading the Good News about Christ, Timothy, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith,

καὶ ἐπέμψαμεν Τιμόθεον *and we sent Timothy*. Timothy is the direct object of the verb, and so Paul wrote his name using the accusative case.

τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν καὶ συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ *our brother and coworker of God*. τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν is very Τιμόθεον. So Paul is making it clear that the *brother* he is speaking about is Timothy. ἡμῶν is the genitive plural form of ἐγώ *I*. As plural it is some variant of *us*. An extremely common use of the genitive is to express possession or ownership, so *us* becomes *our*.

συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ can be most naturally rendered with the genitive expressing possession, just as ἡμῶν was a moment ago. So then, that would Timothy *our brother and God's coworker*.

This fits with the way Paul thought about partnering with God in ministry. In 1 Cor. 3:9 he says *For we are fellow workers with God*.

Still, over the centuries, there have been Christians who have been uncomfortable with this notion. Hence, there are some differences of wording among manuscripts in this verse. The main questions are whether συνεργὸν or διάκονον should be read, and whether τοῦ θεοῦ should be retained or omitted.

I treat this particular textual variation in some detail in the chapter called *Translation Helps >> Textual Differences*.

¹ *Jerusalem* is a slightly uncommon city name, as the NT writers use two different noun forms for it. Ἱερουσαλήμ is a feminine *singular*. There is no space in this

commentary to discuss why NT writers chose Ἱερουσαλήμ in one place and Ἱεροσόλυμα in another.

ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ *in the Good News of Christ*. Refer back to 1:5 for a discussion of how to translate the word εὐαγγέλιον, *Gospel* or *Good News*.

We find ordinary uses of the dative and genitive cases here. ἐν *in* is a preposition that is invariably followed by a dative, and the genitive τοῦ Χριστοῦ is very naturally rendered *of Christ*. You could also express the possessive by writing about *Christ's Good News* rather than *the Good News of Christ*.

The PB translation includes a participle that does not exist in the Greek of this verse: *in spreading the Good News about Christ*. I thought about what it meant to be a coworker in the Good News, and I could only think that it involved *sharing* or *preaching* or *spreading the news* about Jesus. So for the sake of clarity in my translation, I included *spreading*. I also felt that *about Christ* was a legitimate rendering of the genitive case, and a bit more clear and natural in English than *of Christ*.

εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλέσαι *for the purpose of strengthening and encouraging you*. εἰς is a preposition that is often used geographically. *I went to Jerusalem*, or *I went into the synagogue*. But a geographic connotation does not fit here at all. Another use of εἰς is to express purpose, particularly when followed by an article and an infinitive—and that fits perfectly here. Indeed, there are two infinitives linked by καὶ.

ὑμᾶς is accusative, as it is the object of the verbs. *We sent Timothy in order to strengthen and encourage you*.

ὕπὲρ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν *for the sake of the faith of you* or perhaps *concerning your faith*. It is often challenging to determine the best way to render a preposition. But in this case, when you go to BDAG, the very first usage sense is, when followed by a genitive (as here), *for the sake of someone or something*. So Paul and Silas sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage them *for the sake of their faith*. That was the *purpose* Paul and Silas had for sending Timothy. The PB attempts to render this into smooth English with Paul and Silas sending Timothy to Thessalonica to *strengthen and encourage you in your faith*.

3:3

so that nobody should give up their beliefs due to this persecution. For you know that this is our inevitable fate.

Our default setting, after decades of spiritual self-help books and training in empathy, is to somehow to communicate to people that they really *are* undergoing something completely unique and unexpected, and are suffering in a way nobody else could ever truly appreciate.

This was not Paul's strategy.

In 3:2, we saw εἰς τὸ followed by an infinitive as a way of expressing the *purpose* of Timothy's visit. 3:3 carries on talking about this purpose.

τὸ μηδένα σαίνεισθαι (*so that*) *nobody be shaken/disturbed* in their faith. Infinitives are a bit similar to participles in Greek, in that they were quite flexible. Here Paul is using a pattern seen often in the NT of an infinitive acting almost like a finite verb. When an infinitive does this, it will take a subject in the accusative case, τὸ μηδένα *nobody*, rather than in the nominative we would expect with a regular indicative verb.

ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν ταύταις *in/by these persecutions*. ἐν is a preposition that is always followed by a dative, and so it is here.

While Paul uses the plural θλίψεσιν, in English we usually consider the plural *many troubles/persecutions* to be equivalent to the singular word *persecution*. We understand that *persecution* is made up of *many acts of mean-spiritedness* by other people. You can decide whether you want to use a plural or singular in your translation.

αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἶδατε *for you yourselves known*. The verb οἶδατε already has built into it the translation of *you know* (where you is the plural you). αὐτοὶ, then, adds emphasis, along the lines of *you yourselves know*.

You are not surprised to see γὰρ, *for*, in its accustomed place, as the second word of the phrase.

ὅτι εἰς τοῦτο κείμεθα *that for this we are destined*. This is the same use of εἰς that we saw in 3:2, to express purpose. And εἰς is a preposition that is invariably followed by an accusative. Hence, it is no surprise to us that τοῦτο is accusative.

3:4

When we were with you we repeatedly emphasized that we were all going to experience trouble, just as it indeed happened. You knew all about this.

This theme of being destined to suffer is a theme both in this letter¹ and elsewhere in Paul's writings. Both in this, and in Paul's determination to not enrich himself by means of his gospel preaching, Paul is quite out of step with our modern prosperity gospel.²

- Jesus said we would have troubles in this world.
- The prosperity gospel says you should only experience blessing.
- Jesus said *Blessed are the poor*.
- The prosperity gospel says *The poor are cursed. Blessed are the rich*.³
- In His encounter with the rich young ruler, Jesus highlighted the potential spiritual dangers of wealth (Matt. 19:21).
- The prosperity gospel says that wealth invariably reassures us that we have God on our side.
- Jesus said you must take up your cross and follow him.
- The prosperity gospel says that if you have sufficient faith, you won't experience hardship.⁴

But although the prosperity gospel contradicts the true gospel of Jesus, it has achieved a dominant position in the theological marketplace. According to a 2023 survey of 1,002 adults from Lifeway Research, 52% of American Protestant churchgoers say their church teaches God will bless them if they give more money to their church and charities. 45% believe that they *earn* material blessings from God—in a celestial quid-pro-quo.⁵

¹ 1:6, 2:14-16.

² Also known as the *Word of Faith Movement*.

³ Leonardo Blair, *Televangelist Jesse Duplantis Calls Poverty a 'Curse,' Says His Wealth Is Because He's 'Blessed.'* The Christian Post, April 29, 2024
<https://www.christianpost.com/news/televangelist-jesse-duplantis-calls-poverty-a-curse.html>

⁴ Blair Linne, Aixa de López, Sharon Dickens, and Soojin Park. "The Prosperity Gospel: How It Can Mislead and Harm." *The Gospel Coalition* (podcast). November 22, 2024.
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/glo/prosperity-gospel-mislead-harm/>.

⁵ Rom. 11:35 Who has ever given God anything, so that he had to pay it back?

If you filter specifically for those from *evangelical* churches, 80% believe that pursuing holiness is the road to financial riches.¹

The prosperity gospel first took root in America in the mid-20th century among Pentecostals, but has now spread worldwide.² Because it is built around taking verses out of context, there is no quick and easy way to address this heresy other than doing the work to read verses carefully, in context. As we keep this in mind, we return to a careful reading of 1 Thessalonians.

καὶ γὰρ *For indeed/for even*. Paul starts this verse with a double conjunction. The γὰρ *for/because* builds a connection between this verse and the one that preceded it. The καὶ serves to make this more emphatic. NET handles this emphatic quality by beginning the verse *For in fact....* NIV also tries to start the verse with an emphatic *In fact....* Phillips adds emphasis by beginning the verse with *Actually....*

The GNT, on the other hand, believes the καὶ adds so little to the meaning of the verse that it can be left untranslated in this context, and begins the verse *For while we were still with you....* What we learn from this is that top-notch scholars can have different takes on a passage. The take-away for you and I is that we must engage with the passage—particularly at the level of the paragraph—decide what Paul was driving at, and determine how best to communicate the nuances in fluid and fluent English.

ὅτε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἦμεν *when we were with you*. The most common rendering of πρὸς is *to or towards*. But *when we were towards you* does not quite make sense. As we look into the LSJ to get a feel for the lexical range of this word, we see that definition A.I.3 is *before, in the presence of*. *When we were in your presence*, or better yet, *when we were with you* makes very good sense in this context.

ἦμεν is an imperfect *we were*. If Paul had used an aorist tense verb here, it would have indicated that he was thinking of his time there as a completed whole. The

¹ Marissa Postell Sullivan, "Prosperity Gospel Beliefs on the Rise Among Churchgoers", *Lifeway Research*, August 22, 2023. <https://research.lifeway.com/2023/08/22/prosperity-gospel-beliefs-on-the-rise-among-churchgoers/>.

² Surinder Kaur, "India Celebrity Pastor Faces Life in Prison for Rape." *Christianity Today*. April 25, 2025. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2025/04/india-punjab-megachurch-bajinder-singh-healing-rape/>

fact that he used an imperfect tense verb suggests that he was thinking of *ongoing action* in the past.

προελέγομεν ὑμῖν *we told you beforehand*. We have here another imperfect verb. *προλέγω* is a compound word, formed by combining two elements:

- *προ-*: This is a prefix meaning *before* or *in advance*. We make use of this same sense of *pro-* in the word *proactive*.
- *λέγω* (*legō*): This is a verb meaning *to say* or *to speak*.

So we ***repeatedly* or *continuously predicted*** *that trouble would come your way*. I felt like *repeatedly predicted* felt a little unnatural in English. I felt like *repeatedly emphasized* felt more natural, and still carried with it the foretelling quality of *προλέγω*.

ὑμῖν is capturing one of the common uses of the dative, which is to express what we use the English *to* for—to express the indirect object of the verb. *We spoke in advance to you*.

ὅτι μέλλομεν θλίβεσθαι *that we were going to suffer affliction*. *ὅτι* is used here to introduce an indirect quote. That is, Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of what he said without quoting something word-for-word that he said on some occasion.

μέλλομεν is a present tense verb. But hardwired into the nature of the word is a future time focus. *We are about to* or *we are going to*. It is very common for this verb to be followed by an infinitive, as it is here. This infinitive completes the meaning of the verb *μέλλω*, and so is often called a complementary infinitive. It complements, or completes, the verb *μέλλω*.

Paul wrote *θλίβεσθαι* in the passive voice because the subject is receiving the action—being persecuted—rather than initiating the action himself.

καθὼς καὶ ἐγένετο καὶ οἴδατε *just as it has come to pass, and you know*. The first *καὶ* in this phrase is serving as an intensifier rather than a conjunction. While this *καὶ* doesn't have a direct one-word equivalent in English, there are several ways to capture its meaning:

- Just as it indeed came to pass
- Even as it actually happened
- Precisely as it occurred

The second occurrence of καὶ is functioning as a conventional conjunction, *and you know it*.

As discussed in 2:1, οἶδα is a word with perfect-tense suffixes that lacks a proper set of present-tense endings, and is almost always translated as though it were present tense.¹

Paul had had lots of troubles during his various missionary travels—including being stoned and left for dead in Lystra². He clearly told some of these stories when he was in Thessalonica in the hope that he could set up their expectations for what it would mean for them to follow Jesus—who promised that his followers would suffer even as he did.

I wonder how often this sort of story-telling is a part of the initial instructions we share with our converts today.

3:5

So when I could no longer bear it, I sent to find out about your faith, to learn whether or not the tempter had in some way seduced you and our work had been in vain.

How was it possible for Timothy to go back to Thessalonica, when the way was barred for Paul himself—and probably for Silvanus too? We can only speculate, but Timothy, as the junior partner in the missionary team, may not have been so much in the public eye as his two senior colleagues; moreover, Timothy, the son of a Greek father, perhaps looked like a Greek and therefore attracted no special attention in a Greek city, whereas Paul and Silvanus were full Jews and probably immediately recognizable as such—as they had been at Philippi (Acts 16:20).³

The phrase **διὰ τοῦτο** *for this reason*—where διὰ is followed by an accusative pronoun—connects this verse to the preceding context. This construction is common in Paul's writings to build logical connections between sections.⁴

¹ This could be due, at least in part, to the fact that knowing is not an action that can be contained in the past. If you ran yesterday, you are not necessarily running right now. But if you knew something yesterday, you still know it today.

² Acts 14:19

³ Bruce, *Thessalonians*, op. cit. 64.

⁴ Rom. 1:26, 1 Cor. 4:17, 2 Cor. 4:1, Eph. 1:15, etc.

καὶ γὰρ is a combination¹ of **καί** and **ἐγώ**, meaning *and I* or *I also*.

μηκέτι στέγων *when I could bear it no more*. **στέγων** is a present active participle from **στέγω** (to endure, bear, contain). It is in the nominative masculine singular, agreeing with the implied subject *I* (i.e., Paul). This verse illustrates one of the common ways that NT writers used participles, which was to include content related to *time*.² In this case, it is **when I could bear it/contain myself**.

ἔπεμψα *I sent* is the main verb, an aorist active indicative. When NT writers want to indicate ongoing activity in the past, they usually use an imperfect tense. When they want to describe a completed action in the past, as here, they tended to use an aorist. Paul doesn't explicitly state whom he sent, though from context we know it was Timothy.

Paul combined this with the negative **μηκέτι** *no longer*, to say *when I could bear it no longer*, or *when I could not contain myself any longer*.

εἰς plus the article **τὸ** plus an infinitive **γινῶναι** is a construction we have seen elsewhere in 1 Thessalonians (2:12, 3:2). Paul uses this construction to indicate purpose. Here, it could be rendered *in order to know* or *to learn about*.

τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν *your faith* uses the accusative case **πίστιν**, as the direct object of **γινῶναι**, with the genitive pronoun **ὑμῶν** indicating possession.

μή πως *for fear that* functions as an idiomatic construction in Koine Greek. In the NT, Paul alone makes use of it.

In its most basic form, **μή** is a negative particle and **πως** is an adverb meaning *somehow* or *perhaps*. However, when combined, they create a specialized meaning that goes beyond the simple sum of their parts. The construction **μή πως** introduces what grammarians call a *fear clause* or an expression of anxiety about a possible negative outcome.

In Paul's letters, this idiom appears several times, always carrying this sense of apprehension or concern. It's similar to how we might say in English *I was worried that...* or *for fear that...* The construction typically connects to a main

¹ Often called a *crasis* in Greek textbooks.

² **When** he entered the room, **after** speaking, **before** arriving, etc. The exact nature of the

time relationship is made clear by the the context that surrounds the participle in question.

clause that expresses some preventative action taken to avoid the feared outcome.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:5, we can see this pattern clearly: Paul sends someone (the preventative action) because he fears (μή πως) that the tempter might have succeeded in tempting them (the feared outcome).

You can inspect all nine instances of the phrase μή πως in the New Testament by:

1. Copy the phrase μή πως .
2. Go to STEP Bible, and click on the search button in the upper left corner.



3. Paste the phrase into the search box, and enclose it in quotation marks.

The phrase will appear in a box below.

4. Click on the phrase in the box below.

Enter search word
Range: Matt-Rev

Types of search	Click on one of the following searches
Find the exact word(s):	μή πως
Find verses about:	
Find all words meaning:	

If you specify that you want to see the output in the SBLGNT as well as in an English translation, it will make it easy to digest the results of your search.

STEP

SBLG, ESV

ἐπείρασεν ὑμᾶς ὁ πειράζων *the tempter had seduced you* is an interesting phrase, in that it contains two forms of the exact same verb: πειράζω *to tempt, seduce, test*. When it is used as a nominative participle with an article ὁ πειράζων, it becomes like a noun, and acts as the subject of the clause.

When it occurs as an aorist indicative ἐπείρασεν, it is the main verb of the clause. ὑμᾶς is accusative, indicating that Paul meant it to be understood as the direct object of the verb. He was concerned that the tempter had tempted who-or-what? **You**.

One could translate μή πως ἐπείρασεν ὑμᾶς ὁ πειράζων as *for fear that the tempter had somehow tempted you*. NET uses the *tempter/tempted* translations for ὁ πειράζω and ἐπείρασεν, reproducing a bit of Paul's Greek style into English. PB used *tempter/seduced*, for the sake of better English style, where we tend not to like to repeat words in a single sentence.

The CEV has an interesting approach to rendering this phrase: *I hoped Satan had not tempted you*. Although the name *Satan* was used in 2:8, they are looking more at the context of the Bible as a whole. They are transliterating a Hebrew word

ἡ ὁ πειράζων *Satan*, which means *accuser* or *adversary*,¹ as their translation of the Greek ὁ πειράζων.

This is a good illustration of where three translations, NET, PB, and CEV, have different ways of rendering a phrase. Being able to look at that phrase in Greek tells you that all three translations are, in a manner of speaking, *right*. It is hard to answer the question of *which is best* in this instance—though you could say that the CEV rendering is the most thought-provoking, in that it makes you want to do some more digging in the Bible.

It is possible to look at the Greek and wonder where the *somehow/in some way* in the NET and PB translations come from. It goes back to the μή πως, which is about the fear of an uncertain event, which may or may not happen, rather than fear of an inevitable event. NET and PB are attempting to capture the flavor of μή πως in English.

καὶ εἰς κενὸν γένηται ὁ κόπος ἡμῶν. *and our work had been in vain.* ὁ κόπος *the work* is nominative case. So we know that Paul intended us to understand this as the subject of this clause. ἡμῶν communicates one of the common uses of the genitive, to express *of us*, or *our*.

καὶ εἰς κενὸν uses καὶ as a conventional conjunction, and εἰς κενὸν is *in vain*.

One might have expected ἐν κενῷ (ἐν followed by a dative) rather than εἰς followed by the accusative κενὸν. During the Golden Age of Athens, c. 450 B.C., there was a clear distinction between ἐν and εἰς, with εἰς connoting some sort of motion or direction. When translating literature from that era, εἰς is typically translated *into*. We see this usage sometimes in the NT.

- *He went and settled in (εἰς) a town called Nazareth* (Matthew 2:23).
- *Thrown into (εἰς) the fire* (Matthew 3:10)

In Modern Greek, ἐν has completely disappeared—along with the dative case—and has been replaced by εἰς, which can be used both connoting movement or a state of being.²

¹ See Job 1.

² Max Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples*, English ed., adapted from the

fourth Latin ed., vol. 114, Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1963), 33.

In this phrase, *in vain*, there is no sense of motion at all.

In the first century, εἰς was starting to merge with ἐν, sometimes connoting movement, and sometimes rendered as here, as a simple state of being *in*.¹

Earlier in this verse, εἰς is used to indicate purpose εἰς τὸ γινῶναι τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν. As with many words, εἰς is quite versatile, and its meaning only becomes clear as you read the context.²

γένηται illustrates one of the main uses of the subjunctive voice—which is to express *potential* or *possibility*. The indicative voice, on the other hand, expresses statements of fact, reality, or certainty as perceived by the speaker.

Had Paul wanted to say that Satan had in fact seduced the Thessalonian believers away from following Jesus, he would have used the aorist *indicative* voice verb ἐγένετο, from γίνομαι *to be, to happen*.

But since he was concerned about this as a possibility, but not at all sure that it had actually happened, he used the aorist *subjunctive* voice form of γίνομαι, which is γένηται.

We can see just above where Paul used the indicative ἐπείρασεν *whether the tempter had tempted you* (fact, i. e. either he has or he has not, indicative) rather than a subjunctive.

In one sense, it is surprising that Paul would be concerned about these Believers falling away from the faith so *quickly*. It has only been months since he was with them in person.

On the other hand, one could very legitimately be worried that brand new Believers would be at their most vulnerable immediately after deciding to follow Jesus. Persecution seems to have come to these young Christians on the very heels of their decision to follow Jesus.

¹ Ibid.

² For more detail on this, go to <https://Claude.AI> or <https://Perplexity.AI>

and ask *What are the uses of εἰς in the New Testament?*

All of us who are Believers today have been deeply touched by, and are appreciative of, the biblical promises that God will never abandon us. This is indeed something to praise God for!

At the same time, one cannot dismiss the plain meaning of the text such as in chapter 3 of this letter. Paul was genuinely worried about the eternal destiny of these young converts.

Some years ago, I remember having a conversation where it came up that I had read my way through all of Calvin's *Institutes*. "Oh", the person said, "you must be committed to the TULIP." "What's that?", I asked. "The five points of Calvinism", he answered.

I replied, "I do not actually remember any flowers. What I remember is reading 1400 pages of fairly small print by one of the foremost minds in the history of Western Civilization. I'm not sure I could boil all that down into five points."

Indeed, one of the things that impressed me when reading Calvin¹ was where he said, in essence, if there is a conflict between our theology and the what the Bible plainly says, we must choose to believe the Bible.

If one admires Calvin, it is very important that he engage with Calvin himself—who was a first-rate thinker—rather than the 2nd or 3rd rate thinkers whom we call Calvinists...at least those who would summarize 1400 pages of theological reflection with just five points.

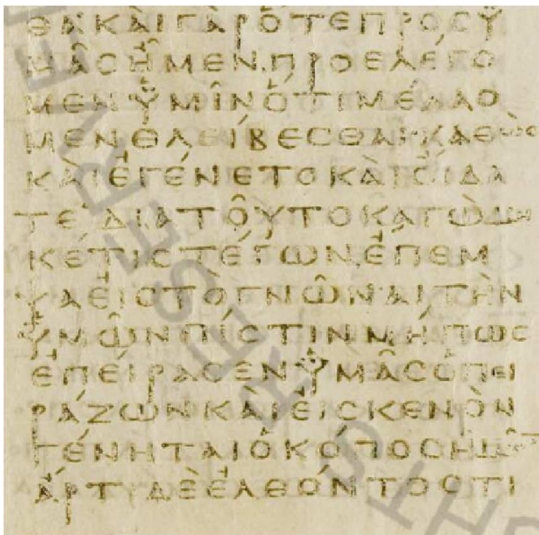
One could even ask the question whether Calvin himself would have made a good 21st century Calvinist.

3:6

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, he tells us good news about your faith and love, and that you always remember us with affection and long to see us just as we long to see you!

¹ Though I cannot lay my hands on the reference for the quote that underlies my paraphrase. I underlined it in my volume. But when we downsized last year and

moved into a smaller house, I threw out 1,000 kg of books...including my copy of Calvin.



1 Thess. 3:4-5, plus the first 3 words of verse 6
Codex Vaticanus, c. A.D. 325

Ἄρτι δὲ *But now*. You may elect to start your translation with the word *But*, which is certainly a legitimate translation of δὲ. It is also possible that Paul intended to simply continue his narrative, and was using δὲ to mark the beginning of a new paragraph.

Since the letter was almost surely written as one continuous stream of words, with no spaces and no paragraph breaks, Paul would have had to indicate any

divisions in his thought with vocabulary items.

The scribe who made Codex Vaticanus made his copy of 1 Thessalonians 275 years after Paul wrote the letter. It does, however, give us a feel for what Paul's original might have looked like.¹

ἐλθόντος Τιμοθέου *Now that Timothy has come*. This verse contains a construction that is not common in 1 Thessalonians—this is the only instance—but is used over 300 times elsewhere in the NT: a genitive participle paired with a genitive noun that acts very much like a nominative noun with an indicative verb. Greek teachers call this construction a *genitive absolute*.

Typically, a genitive absolute phrase could be eliminated from the sentence, and the sentence would still make sense. The genitive absolute gives more

¹ Students of the NT have objected to the Vatican Library's practice of overlaying a watermark on each page this MS. There is no need to indicate ownership in this way. We all know the MS resides in the Vatican Library. We call it *Codex Vaticanus*, for goodness sake.

The Vatican Library, however, has a long, sordid history of obstructing those who want to study this manuscript.

Samuel Tregelles (whose edition of the Greek NT is one of the building blocks

of the SBLGNT) was allowed to look at the MS, but said, *They would not let me open it without searching my pockets, and depriving me of pen, ink, and paper; and at the same time two prelati kept me in constant conversation in Latin, and if I looked at a passage too long, they would snatch the book out of my hand.*

Samuel P. Tregelles, *A Lecture on the Historic Evidence of the Authorship and Transmission of the Books of the New Testament* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1852), 83-85.

information—often using the participle’s ability to talk about time. Examples of this in other biblical books include:

- Matthew 21:10—καὶ εἰσελθόντος αὐτοῦ εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα ἐσεΐσθη πᾶσα ἡ πόλις *And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up.*
εἰσελθόντος αὐτοῦ εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα **When** he entered Jerusalem is the genitive absolute phrase, where the genitive αὐτοῦ is the subject of the verb and the participle εἰσελθόντος acts like an indicative verb.
It retains the participle’s ability to talk about *time*. So depending on the context, it could be **after** he entered Jerusalem, **when** he entered Jerusalem, **before** he entered Jerusalem. Context will suggest what sort of time connection is appropriate.
- Mark 14:43—Καὶ εὐθὺς ἔτι αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος παραγίνεται Ἰούδας *And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas arrived.*
ἔτι αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος **while** he was still speaking is the genitive absolute phrase, with αὐτοῦ he acting as the subject of the verb.
The participle includes a time reference here as well, with the action happening at the same time as Judas arriving.

While it may seem odd to spend so much time discussing a grammatical construction that occurs only once in 1 Thessalonians, NT writers found the genitive absolute to be enormously useful in story-telling. It appears *all the time* in the Gospels and Acts. And indeed, it appears here in this epistle as Paul is telling the story of sending Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the how the Believers there were faring.

While most translations separate verses 6 and 7 into separate sentences, for the sake of readability in English, in Greek they are one long sentence—with a genitive absolute construction in verse 6 and the main clause in verse 7.

πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀφ’ ὑμῶν *to us from you*. Two prepositional phrases. πρὸς followed by an accusative is rendered as *to*. ἀπὸ is always followed by a genitive. ἀπὸ becomes ἀπ’ when the next word begins with a vowel. And ἀπ’ becomes ἀφ’ when the vowel following has a rough breathing mark.

εὐαγγελισαμένου ἡμῖν τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ὑμῶν *he tells us good news about your faith and love*. We have another genitive participle here, which is part of an extended genitive absolute construction, where Τιμοθέου continues as the genitive-case subject of the verb.

εὐαγγελίζω is an interesting verb. It is a compound word made up of a prefix εὐ, which is often used in the sense of *good, well, pleasant*.¹ ἀγγελίζω is a verb related to ἄγγελος, *angel* or *messenger*. ἀγγελία is another related word, which means *message* or *news*. Put them together and you have εὐαγγελίζω—a word that means *to announce good news*.

Hence, Τιμοθέου εὐαγγελισμένου ἡμῖν τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ὑμῶν is *Timothy told us the good news about your faith and love*. πίστιν and ἀγάπην are both accusative case nouns, and are the direct objects of the preposition εὐαγγελισμένου. ὑμῶν is carrying out one of the standard functions of the genitive: to express possession. So it is **your** faith and love.

ἡμῖν is dative, and illustrates one of the standard uses of the dative case: to designate the indirect object of the verb. So then, *Timothy told the good news to us*.

If you find that you are a bit fuzzy on standard grammatical terms like direct object and indirect object,² then a short book you might find helpful is Greenwood, Kyle. *Dictionary of English Grammar for Students of Biblical Languages* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020).

καὶ ὅτι ἔχετε μνησίαν ἡμῶν ἀγαθὴν πάντοτε and *that you always have a good memory³ of us*. We see Paul using a lot of freedom here in his word order, particularly compared to English which is relatively inflexible. A wooden rendering of this phrase would be *and that you have a memory of us good always*.

μνησίαν ἀγαθὴν *good memories* is in the accusative case, because it is the direct object of the verb ἔχετε. In Greek, Paul writes about a good memory. In English, we always express this as a plural. We have *good memories* of somebody, even if it is a memory of a single event.

ἡμῶν is demonstrating one of the standard functions of the genitive: to express what we do in English with the word *of*.

¹ We borrow this use of εὐ in several English words. For instance, eulogy is a speech where we say good things about a person after they die.

² These are terms that are used to describe grammatical features not just of Greek, but in English and other languages.

³ See the *Translation Helps* chapter section entitled *We Remember You*.

ἐπιποθοῦντες ἡμᾶς ἰδεῖν *you want to see us.*

In English, when we have two or more verbs to string together, we like to have indicative verbs joined by *and*. So our expectation is that in Greek we would see ἔχετε καὶ ἐπιποθεῖτε—*you have* (good memories of us) *and you want* (to see us).

However, Greek writers—including Paul—preferred to use an indicative verb and a participle rather than two indicative verbs connected with καὶ. When rendering Greek back into English, it is standard to take this indicative-verb/participle and translate it with two indicatives: *you always remember us with affection and long to see us.*

ἰδεῖν is an infinitive that completes the idea started with ἐπιποθοῦντες. This sort of construction is called a *complementary infinitive* in Greek textbooks. One could also think of ἰδεῖν as a *verbal noun*, that functions as the direct object of the participle ἐπιποθοῦντες.

καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς ὑμᾶς *just as indeed we (long to see) you.* καὶ is functioning as an intensifier here rather than a conjunction. The verb in this last phrase is understood to be ἐπιποθοῦντες ἰδεῖν from earlier in the sentence.

3:7

Because of this, we were cheered up and comforted about you, brothers and sisters, through all of our troubles and difficulties, by hearing of your faith.

διὰ τοῦτο *Because of this, as a result* is a phrase that Paul uses in 3:5 and 2:13 as well, to connect the current verse with what came before.

παρεκλήθημεν *we were comforted* is the main verb, in the aorist passive indicative, and indicates the action that was received by the grammatical subject of the sentence. This demonstrates that Paul and his companions were the recipients of comfort rather than the ones initiating the action of comforting. That it is aorist rather than imperfect indicates that Paul is thinking of completed action in the past, rather than an ongoing action in the past.

ἀδελφοί *brothers and sisters.* Unless the context makes it clear that the speaker is addressing only men, this word is best rendered as *brothers and sisters.*

If you look at the word analysis in STEP Bible, it says that this is a vocative case noun. The vocative plural ἀδελφοί is identical in form to the nominative plural ἀδελφοί. STEP Bible calls this a vocative case because the editor, looking at the

context of the verse, decided that Paul was addressing these believers directly by name.

ἐφ' ὑμῖν ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ ἀνάγκῃ καὶ θλίψει ἡμῶν *about you, in all our troubles and difficulties*. This phrase is interesting, in that we have two uses of ἐπὶ in quick succession, but with slightly different senses.

The first instance of ἐπὶ has become abbreviated as ἐπ' because the next word starts with a vowel. And ἐπ' has become ἐφ' because that vowel has a rough breathing mark.

ἐπὶ is a preposition that may be followed by accusative, dative, or genitive nouns. You will translate ἐπὶ slightly different, depending on the case of what follows it. In this verse, it is followed by datives.

ἐπὶ has a broad lexical range—five pages of small print in the BDAG lexicon. But in English, *bank* can either be the side of a river or a building where money is stored. There is no confusion among English speakers as soon as the word is used in a sentence. The context makes the meaning clear immediately.

So it is that Paul's readers would have understood what he meant by both these instances of ἐπὶ as soon as they read this sentence. We modern translators, however, may need to sift through all five pages in BDAG before we find renderings that make sense in this context.

διὰ τῆς ὑμῶν πίστεως *through your faith*. διὰ πίστεως is a prepositional phrase, where διὰ followed by the genitive πίστεως, *through faith*.

Had διὰ been followed by an accusative, we would have rendered it along the lines of *because of*.

τῆς ὑμῶν does what we expect a genitive to do here—express possession. So it is *we were comforted though **your** faith*, i.e., *the faith **of you***.

The PB translation understands there to be an implied verb that needs to be supplied. *We were comforted **by hearing** about your faith*, or *we were comforted **when we heard** about your faith*.

In the broader context of the letter, this verse serves as a pivot point from Paul's recounting of past events and concerns (chapters 1-3) to his exhortations and teachings for the future (chapters 4-5).

3:8

For we can breathe freely now, knowing that you stand fast in the Lord.

ὅτι νῦν ζῶμεν ἔαν ὑμεῖς στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ. *Because now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.*

I.e., The news of your unwavering faith and love is the very breath of life to us. After their anxiety over the Thessalonians Paul and the others felt great relief; they could now breathe freely.¹

Paul felt enormous empathy with his converts. When they were led astray by others, he became angry. When they slipped backwards, he became anxious. When they were solidly rooted in Jesus, he was delighted.

There is not much that is surprising or difficult in the grammar of this short verse. ἐν κυρίῳ demonstrates how a dative noun invariably follows the preposition ἐν.

We are again aware of the difference between the English article *the* and the Greek article—sometimes translated as *the*, sometimes as *his* or *her*, sometimes not translated at all, and sometimes missing when we would expect it to be present.

In this situation, *in Lord* would be terrible English, while *in **the** Lord* makes good sense.

Paul believed that the Christian life involves a union with Jesus, an intimate connection between our life and Jesus' life.

In the 20th century, an enormously widespread evangelistic appeal was to *give your heart to Jesus*. This was interesting because it was not actually biblical language. Jesus never said *give your heart to me*. What Jesus said was *follow me* (Matt. 4:19), *follow me* (Matt. 8:22), *follow me* (Matt. 9:9).²

¹ Bruce, *Thessalonians*, op. cit., 67.

² As well as in Matt. 16:24, Matt. 19:21, Mark 10:21, Luke 9:59, Luke 18:22, John 1:43, John 21:19.



It may well be that the 60/40 split that many churches have between women and men (70/30 in some instances) is related to this unbiblical use of romance language to describe the relationship between Jesus and the believer.

Women seem to tolerate this kind of syrupy-Christian language better than men—and may at times even celebrate it.

A man will call a golf shot lovely. He will call his wife lovely. But for a man to call another *man* lovely,¹ or to speak of *giving his heart* to another man—that is just creepy.²

On the other hand, men and women alike can wrap their heads around Jesus' own unambiguous call to follow him.

All this said, in Paul, there is a clear sense that in the process of choosing to follow Jesus, there is a union between his life and our own. We live *in the Lord*.

¹ As in these worship lyrics:

Jesus, How Lovely You Are
You Are So Gentle, So Pure And
Kind

You Shine As The Morning Star
Jesus, How Lovely You Are.

² It is reasonable to discuss, of course, whether men *ought* to find this creepy or not. But *ought-ness* and *is-ness* are two different things.

The Canadian church that has leaned most heavily into LGBT-friendliness over the past few decades is the United Church of Canada. One apparent consequence of this is that United churches have been shrinking.

Indeed, Kendra Fry has built a whole business around helping congregations repurpose their church buildings after they have gone into

bankruptcy. In an interview with CBC radio in 2021, she said that United churches were closing at the rate of one per week in Canada.

Kent Hoffman, *Why Canada's 27,000 Faith Buildings Are Crucial for Communities*, CBC Radio, December 12, 2021.

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/tapestry/how-religious-practice-continues-to-transform-through-the-pandemic-1.6281077/why-canada-s-27-000-faith-buildings-are-crucial-for-communities-1.6281233>.

Rohadi. *Massive Declines - 2011-2021 Religious Affiliation Numbers in Canada*, Rohadi.com (blog), 2022.

<https://www.rohadi.com/2022/church-life/massive-declines-2011-2021-religious-affiliation-canada/> suggests that the United Church could cease to exist by 2040.

ἐάν is often translated as *if*, and followed by a subjunctive verb—which communicates potential or possibility—and talks about a situation which may or may not come to pass.

However, in this instance, Paul follows it with an indicative voice verb. Indicative voice deals in reality, in facts, not in possibilities. Paul knows the Thessalonian believers are holding fast to Jesus. It is because of this indicative verb that the PB version translates ἐάν as *knowing that you stand fast*, rather than *knowing if you stand fast*.

Live of course has to be metaphorical. Paul is not denying that he was alive when he was ignorant of how the Thessalonian believers were doing. It is that he and Silas experienced an enormous release of anxiety after the return of Timothy. The PB version tries to capture this metaphorical sense with *now we can breathe freely*.

3:9

How can we ever thank God enough for the joy we feel about you in God's presence

This verse is considerably more challenging to render than the last verse was. We shall look at each piece of it, and then you can look back to the PB rendering above to see how I tried to assemble all the elements together into comprehensible English.

τίνα γὰρ εὐχαριστίαν *For what thanks.* τίνα typically introduces a question, and depending on the context would be translated by *who?*, *what?*, *which?*, *why?*

τίνα and εὐχαριστίαν are both accusative case, as they function as the direct object of the verb ἀνταποδοῦναι *to give back/to repay*. It is harder to recognize a direct object in a question than it is in a statement. But the direct object receives the action of the verb, and in a question often appears ahead of the verb.

Here are some examples:

- Question: *What did John buy?*
- Verb: *buy*
- Ask: *John bought what?*
- Direct object: *what* (at the beginning of the question)

- Question: *Who did Sarah invite to the party?*

- Verb: *invite*
- Ask: *Sarah invited whom?*
- Direct object: *who* (at the beginning of the question)

δυνάμεθα τῷ θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι *are we able to give back to God*. ἀνταποδοῦναι is considered a *complementary infinitive*, as it completes the idea started in δυνάμεθα.

τῷ θεῷ (to God) appears in the dative case, which tells us that Paul intended these words to function as the indirect object of the verb—indicating the recipient of the thanksgiving.

περὶ ὑμῶν *concerning you*. περὶ is normally translated as *about* or *concerning* when the noun/pronoun that follows it is genitive.

ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ χαρᾷ ἣ χαίρομεν δι' ὑμᾶς *in all the joy or for all the joy with which we rejoice on your account*. ἐπὶ, followed by a dative, has a broad lexical range. You will need to dig a bit to find a sense of the word that fits in this context.

ἣ is a dative singular pronoun that connects the rest of the sentence to what went before. In this case, it connects to χαρᾷ, and agrees with it in number, gender and case. Depending on the context, you will probably render it as *who*, *which*, or *that*.

In Greek textbooks, this is called a relative pronoun, since it is a *pronoun*—referring back to a previous noun—that *relates* one part of the sentence to the other part.

χαρᾷ ἣ χαίρομεν *rejoicing with joy* seems an odd phrase to us. But it finds its roots in the Hebrew Old Testament.

- Genesis 2:16 - אָכַל תֹּאכַל *eating you shall eat*
- Genesis 2:17 - מוֹת תָּמוּת *dying you shall die*
- Genesis 22:17 - בָּרַךְ אֶבְרָהָם *blessing I will bless you*
- Exodus 21:12 - מוֹת יוּמָת *dying he shall be put to death*
- Exodus 22:16 - מְהֵרָה יִמְהַרְנָהּ *endowing he shall endow her*
- Numbers 23:25 - לֹא תִקְבְּנוּ *cursing you shall not curse him*
- 1 Samuel 20:6 - שָׁאַל נִשְׁאַל *asking he asked*

This construction made its way into the Septuagint as Greek translators rendered the Hebrew, which then influenced NT Greek style.

- Luke 22:15 - ἐπιθυμία ἐπεθύμησα *With desire I have desired*
- Acts 4:17 - ἀπειλῇ ἀπειλησώμεθα *Let us threaten them with a threat*
- Acts 5:28 - παραγγελία παρηγγείλαμεν *With a command we commanded*
- James 5:17 - προσευχῇ προσήύξατο *He prayed with prayer*

Rendering ἣ as **with** which is based on our assumption that Paul was implying a preposition *with* that would be followed by a dative. A couple of possibilities here would include σὺν ἣ or ἐν ἣ. While ἐν primarily means *in* or *among*, it can sometimes carry the sense of *with* in certain contexts.

Part of what makes this verse feel awkward to me is that δι' ὑμᾶς *because of you* seems redundant with περὶ ὑμῶν *concerning you*. I am not quite sure why Paul included both of these phrases when either one alone would seem to have been sufficient.

However, there are no textual variants in any of the manuscripts that include this verse. So including both phrases seemed natural enough not just to Paul, but to generations of Greek-speaking scribes and copyists.

δι' ὑμᾶς is actually διὰ ὑμᾶς, but because ὑμᾶς begins with a vowel, first century Greeks preferred to drop the vowel *α* from the preceding preposition διὰ.

ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν *before our God or in the presence of our God*. There are two different uses of the genitive in this short phrase. One common use of the genitive is to express what we would say in English *with of or from*. Hence ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ would be *in the presence of God*.

A second common use of the genitive is to express possession. So ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν would be *in the presence of our God*.

The phrase ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν serves several important functions. First, it emphasizes that Paul's joy and thanksgiving aren't merely human emotions—they are taking place in God's presence, suggesting these feelings arise within the context of prayer and worship.

The phrase also serves a validating function. By stating that his joy over the Thessalonians exists *before God*, Paul is declaring this joy's authenticity and spiritual significance. It's as if he is saying, *God himself is witness to how much joy you bring us*. This adds weight to his expressions of gratitude and creates a sense

of accountability—these are not casual or exaggerated statements, but ones made consciously in God's presence.

The phrase helps us understand that for Paul, emotions and relationships are not merely human experiences but are always understood within the context of our relationship with God.

Furthermore, this phrase appears at other significant points in 1 Thessalonians. We see it in 1:3 regarding their *work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope...before our God and Father*, and again in 2:19 regarding their hope and joy and crown of boasting *before our Lord Jesus at his coming*. This repetition creates a theological framework throughout the letter that emphasizes how the Christian life is lived out consciously in God's presence.

3:10

praying night and day with all our hearts that we will be able to see you again in person, and to fill in the gaps in your faith?

Verses 9 and 10 are, in Greek, one long question. You may decide to render it that way—as one sentence—or you may follow CEV and NIV to make verse 9 a question and verse 10 a statement. Or you may follow the GNT and NLT and render 9-10 as two statements.

It is a little difficult to render verse 9, particularly, into natural-sounding English. Different translators come up with varying solutions to this challenge.

νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας *night and day*. We discussed the *genitive of time* back in 2:9 as a way of talking about a time within which some action took place. Here also Paul uses the genitives to express that he was praying continuously, by night and day.¹

After leaving Thessalonica, Paul went and attempted—with no very apparent success—to do some evangelism in Athens (Acts 17). Then he went on to Corinth, established his tentmaking business, and dialogued with people about Jesus (Acts 18). But all the while, he was consumed with anxiety for the

¹ Wallace, *Grammar*, op. cit., 122-124.

Thessalonian believers. They were always on his mind, and praying for them was an ongoing activity.

ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ δεόμενοι *praying earnestly/with all our hearts*. ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ is a compound word, combining ὑπέρ (over, above) and ἐκπερισσοῦ (extraordinary in amount, remarkable). While in the 21st century, we transliterate ὑπέρ as *hyper*, in the 19th century it was transliterated as *hyper*, and in that form it made its way into English. So Paul is saying that he was hyper-intensely praying for the Thessalonians.

Paul liked to use *hyper* in front of words. ὑπερεπερίσσευσεν in Rom. 5:20 (to be hyper-plentiful), ὑπερφρονεῖν in Rom 12:3 (to hyper-think, or overthink something), ὑπερύψωσεν in Phil 2:9 (to hyper-honor someone).

As his friends would read letters from him, I imagine that as they ran into these words they would smile and say to each other, *This sounds **just like Paul!***

With all of the varied uses of the participle in Greek, here is one instance that is similar to the plain-vanilla participle that is used in English, where we take a verb and put an *—ing* on the end: *praying*.

δεόμενοι is a nominative plural masculine, and so refers back to the subject of the sentence, the *we* of verse 9.

εἰς τὸ ἰδεῖν *in order to see* talks about the *purpose* behind all of Paul's prayers. εἰς + an article + an infinitive (τὸ ἰδεῖν) is a common way in Greek of expressing purpose or goal.

In 3:5, there is a discussion of how to use STEP Bible to look up every instance of a phrase. You might do that with εἰς τὸ to get a better feeling for purpose clauses.

ὑμῶν τὸ πρόσωπον *your face*. τὸ πρόσωπον is in the accusative case, which signals that it is the direct object of the verb ἰδεῖν, with ὑμῶν functioning as a possessive genitive *your*.

πρόσωπον means *face* but is often used idiomatically to represent personal presence. So something like *before his face* often gets translated as *in his presence*.

You may transate εἰς τὸ ἰδεῖν ὑμῶν τὸ πρόσωπον as *to see your faces*, or you can follow the GNT, NIV, NLT, and CEV to be a bit more idiomatic and render it as *to see you*, or *to see you personally*.

καὶ καταρτίσαι τὰ ὑστερήματα τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν *and to fill in the gaps in your faith.* Paul had a second purpose that he introduced with εἰς, and it was *to make complete the deficiencies in your faith*. It is clear that the Thessalonians understood that Jesus was returning, but they had misunderstood some key aspects of that truth.

τὰ ὑστερήματα is an accusative plural, and the direct object of καταρτίσαι.

τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν *of or from your faith* would be a natural rendering of the genitive. But in English, *the deficiencies in your faith* is more appropriate.

In our own context, it is easy to imagine that somebody could become a Christian, but still need teaching around discipleship—what the implications of following Jesus are for behavior in the workplace, for child-rearing, for engagement with social media, for time management and mental health.

Paul wanted to fill in the gaps in their faith that were the first century equivalents of these sorts of issues. The rest of this letter is a partial solution to this need.

3:11

Now may God himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus direct our path to you.

δὲ is sometimes translated as *but*. That does not at all fit the context here, as there is no opposing sort of contrast. The word is also used as a way of marking a new thought—what we would mark by using a new paragraph.

GNT, NLT and CEV all leave this δὲ untranslated. NET and NIV translate it as *Now...* In doing so, they echo how many 21st century preachers handle a benediction at the end of their sermons. But even there, in English, the word *Now* has next to no meaning. In fact, it is rather like a verbal way of indicating a new paragraph—signalling that the sermon itself is over and the benediction is about to begin.

κατευθύναι *to direct/guide*. There are different moods in Greek verbs, many of which we have run into in 1 Thessalonians:

- Indicatives—which deals with factual reality.
- Participles—which have a range of uses.

- Infinitives—which perform similar to English infinitives (e.g. to run) as well as being verbal nouns when preceded by an article.
- Subjunctives—which deal with situations which are potential, and not yet (or maybe not ever) factual reality.
- Imperatives—we have not run into these yet in 1 Thessalonians, but will begin to see them in 5:11, when Paul starts giving commands to the Thessalonians.

This verse contains a verb in the *optative* mood. This is a mood that is uncommon in the NT. Out of the 137,782¹ words in the Greek New Testament, there are only 68 instances of optative mood verbs. κατευθύναι in this verse is one of them.

κατευθύνω means *to direct one's steps* or *to lead*. When it occurs in the optative mood, it means *may (so and so) direct (our) steps* or *may (so and so) lead (us)*.

Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἡμῶν καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς *Now may God himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus* contains all the nominative case nouns that provide the grammatical subject of the sentence.

Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἡμῶν. By itself, αὐτὸς would be *he*. But when we already have a nominative case subject ὁ θεός, then αὐτὸς is an intensifier, and is rendered *himself*.

In combination with the optative mood verb, this verse would begin *May our God and Father himself*. ἡμῶν is acting in its normal genitive way of designating possession, *our* or *of us*.

In this verse, a single article (ὁ) governs both nouns (θεός and πατήρ). This construction, known as the Granville Sharp rule,² indicates that both terms refer to the same person—God who is also Father.

¹ You can find slightly different word counts, depending on what decisions are made about various textual variants.

For instance, the SBLGNT normally omits John 7:53-8:11, Jesus meeting the woman caught in adultery. The NA28/UBS5 GNT includes those verses, but leaves them in brackets.

Bob's Greek NT = the SBLGNT, but includes the John 8 pericope from the NA28. When you do this, you come up with 137,782 words in the NT.

² Wallace, *Grammar*, op. cit., 270-277.

People who take their theological inspiration from Coca Cola commercials rather than the Bible¹ are fond of saying that God is the father of everybody in the world.

In the New Testament, however, God is referred to as *Father* only of those who have committed themselves to following Jesus with their whole hearts.

καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς *and the Lord of us Jesus*, i.e. *and our Lord Jesus*. While not expressing a full-bodied theology of the Trinity here, it is clear that Paul is directing his prayer—in the OT, directed to God alone—equally to the Father and to Jesus.

Further, κύριος is used to translate יהוה YHWH, the personal covenant name of the God of Israel, thousands of times throughout the LXX. Its use here as a title for Jesus was not done casually.

It is also striking that Paul uses a singular verb, κατευθύναι, with a compound subject *the Father and Jesus*. This may have theological implications regarding the unity of Father and Son in Paul's thinking.²

τὴν ὁδὸν ἡμῶν *our path*. ἣν ὁδὸν is in the accusative case, serving as the direct object of κατευθύναι.

The prepositional phrase πρὸς ὑμᾶς indicates direction toward the recipients. When πρὸς is used with the accusative (ὑμᾶς), it typically indicates motion toward something or someone.³ In this case, it expresses Paul's desired destination—the Thessalonian believers.

¹ <https://youtu.be/KW9cuta7mdE?si=6ldRcMBAKK5QDCbI> gives a feeling for the mood I am talking about.

This also suggests that while parables like the Good Samaritan talk about helping everybody, Matthew 25:31-46 is talking specifically about helping other Believers, as *these* are the brothers and sisters of Jesus.

² Though F.F. Bruce thinks that a singular verb could be used with two subjects

without necessarily having theological implications. Bruce, *Thessalonians*, op. cit., 71.

I find it unsettling to disagree with F.F. Bruce, but I can only recall having seen multiple subjects used with a singular verb where the subjects were neuter plural.

³ Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 171.

3:12

May the Lord make you to grow and overflow in love for each other and to all people, even as we have toward you,

After determining that the optative mood is very uncommon in the NT, we find two more of them in this verse.¹ And if you have a feeling that the 3rd person aorist active optative singular περισσεύσαι reminds you of the aorist active infinitive περισσεῦσαι, you are absolutely correct. The two forms are identical but for the accent.² There will be tip-offs in the context that will tell you what you are looking at.³

- The optative expresses a wish or a possibility.
- There is a main verb stated or implied in a sentence that uses an infinitive. Infinitives typically function as subordinate elements in a sentence, complementing or modifying the main verb.
- The optative will *be* the main verb of a clause.
- The infinitive can be used with articles, in indirect discourse, or as a complement to certain verbs.

We have seen infinitives with articles and as complements to other verbs in 1 Thessalonians. An example of an infinitive in indirect discourse would be Acts 23:8—Σαδδουκαῖοι μὲν γὰρ λέγουσιν μὴ εἶναι ἀνάστασιν *For the Sadducees say that **there is** no resurrection.*

- The optative will have a nominative-case subject.
- If the infinitive has any subject at all, it will be in the accusative case.

Ὑμᾶς δὲ ὁ κύριος πλεονάσαι καὶ περισσεύσαι τῇ ἀγάπῃ *May the Lord make you to grow and overflow in love.* As with the previous verse, δὲ is not functioning as a conjunction and introducing a contrast, but is rather like a paragraph marker, indicating that there is a slight shift of focus to a new thought.

¹ This means that 3 out of the 68 instances of the optative in the NT occur in these two verses. That is to say, 4.4% of all NT optatives occur right here.

² And we know that when Paul originally wrote this letter, he used no accents at all.

³ Of course, you can look to the word analysis in STEP Bible and it will tell you if

you are seeing an optative. But it is the context that tells the STEP Bible editors what they are dealing with.

This is not unlike the difference between the vocative and nominative cases in nouns, where the form is identical, and the context tells the editors what they are looking at.

ὕμᾱς is in the accusative case, telling us that Paul intended us to understand it as the direct object of the verbs. *May the Lord make **you** increase in love.*

ὁ κύριος is in the nominative case, making it the subject of the verb. Paul is praying that **the Lord** would cause these things to happen.

The context leaves us expecting to see the prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ *in love*, but ἐν is missing. Greek sometimes implies prepositions, particularly ἐν, which is invariably followed by a dative noun or pronoun.¹

Many Christians often make a lot of the noun ἀγάπη, and of the related verb ἀγαπάω. See the Translation Helps chapter, the section called ἀγαπάω *and φιλέω in John 21:15-17* for a discussion of this.

The prepositional phrases εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας *to each other and to everyone* show the direction/recipients of this love.

- εἰς with the accusative typically indicates direction or purpose.
- ἀλλήλους refers to fellow believers within the community.
- πάντας broadens the scope to include all people, not just fellow Christians.

καθάπερ *just as/even as* introduces a comparison between the Thessalonians' love and that of Paul and his companions.

καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς *we (have) towards you*. ἡμεῖς is a nominative case noun, which—in combination with the καὶ that adds emphasis—tells us that we have a new clause starting out. We are expecting to see a main verb of some sort. However, Paul left this verb implied, and we must fill it in as best we can.

Paul encourages the Thessalonians to imitate him in 1:6. There, the context suggests that this imitation was particularly evident in how they received the

¹ In checking the grammars of Wallace and Blass et al., I could find no reference to ἐν being implied by a dative noun..

It may be that Greek grammars, instead of speaking about an implied ἐν, discuss uses of the dative case that can sometimes encompass meanings typically expressed by ἐν without the preposition being present. This would include, for

instance, locative and instrumental uses of the dative, as well as the dative of reference.

Rather than memorizing these rather opaque grammatical categories (*locative!?!?*), I find it easier to say *Sometimes ἐν is missing, and yet a prepositional phrase seems to be implied by the use of a dative case noun.*

word with joy despite suffering. Here, Paul wants these new believers to imitate him in the sort of love he has modeled for them.

3:13

to the end that your hearts are resolute and blameless in holiness before our God and Father until the return of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας *to the end that your hearts are resolute.* εἰς τό + an infinitive is a common construction in Greek for expressing purpose, essentially meaning "in order that" or "so that." This construction is part of a broader pattern of using prepositions + article + infinitive to convey various adverbial meanings.

Common Prepositions:

- εἰς τό + infinitive: *in order to* or *for the purpose of*
- πρὸς τό + infinitive: also expresses purpose
- διὰ τό + infinitive: *because*

Infinitives like στηρίξαι, preceded by an article, function as verbal nouns. A verbal noun in English might be *running* in the sentence, *Running is a healthy thing to do*. In this case, a verb is actually the subject of the sentence.

τὰς καρδίας is in the accusative case, since it is the direct object of the infinitive. The genitive pronoun ὑμῶν (of you) modifies καρδίας.

ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας presents an interesting word order. We would have expected τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν. When a Greek writer fronts a word—putting an unexpected word in front of others—is frequently to add emphasis to the word. Since Paul did not have access to things like italics or underlining of words,¹ changing the word order was the way he indicated emphasis.

ἀμέμπτους *blameless* or *without fault* is an accusative plural adjective, which tells us that Paul intended it to be understood as modifying the accusative plural noun καρδίας. The preposition ἐν is followed—as it invariably is—by a noun in the dative case.

¹ These typographical tools had not yet been invented.

A wooden rendering of this phrase might be *for the strengthening of your blameless hearts*. Clearly one needs to work on that phrase a bit to put it into smooth English.

ἐν ἀγιωσύνῃ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν *in holiness before our God and Father* sets a context for blamelessness. Just as in 3:11, a single article (ὁ) governs both nouns (θεὸς and πατήρ). This construction, known as the Granville Sharp rule,¹ indicates that both terms—when singular, personal, common nouns (not proper names)—refer to the same person. In this case, God who is also Father.

Linguistic rules are not things that get established first, which ancient writers have to adhere to. Granville Sharp lived from 1735 to 1813,² so ancient writers never even knew of his existence. Rather, a linguistic rule is a result of countless observations of how ancient writers actually used the language. That is, it is a descriptive rule rather than a proscriptive rule.³

Once we realize that ancient authors wrote Greek in such a way that it adhered to this rule, it throws Titus 2:13 into sharp relief. Here, Paul talks about τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ *our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, affirming Jesus as both God and Savior*.

The Apostle Peter does the same thing in 2 Peter 1:1 where he talks about τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ *our God and Savior Jesus Christ*.

Here in 1 Thess. 3:13, Paul is not talking about Christology, but about God the Father. However, the consistent use of this construction by Paul and its interpretation as referring to a single entity further supports the validity of Sharp's rule in New Testament Greek.

hearts resolute and blameless in holiness before our God. This sounds good, but is a bit abstract. Paul will unpack what this looks like practically in chapter 4.

ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ *at the return of our Lord Jesus*. The preposition ἐν has a wide range of meanings and uses in Koine Greek, including

¹ Wallace, *Grammar*, op. cit., 270-277.

² He was a brilliant Classics and biblical scholar, and a key leader in the struggle to abolish the slave trade in the British Empire. As an aside, he was an accomplished singer, and often signed his name as G#.

John Sheppard, *Granville Sharp: Father of the Anti-Slavery Movement in Britain* (London: London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, 2007).

³ Wallace, *Grammar*, op. cit., 270-290.

spatial, temporal, and instrumental senses. While its primary meaning is often spatial (*in* or *within*), it can also indicate time when used with temporal nouns or phrases. Here, ἐν is used with παρουσία, which refers to the coming or arrival of Christ. This usage of ἐν with parousia creates a temporal sense, indicating the time at which something occurs.

μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ *with all of his saints*. This verse is consistent with the notion that all of God's people who have died are now in heaven—an intermediate place to be—and will return with Jesus for the renewal of the earth.¹

μετὰ is a preposition that, when followed by an accusative, is a marker of time, such as *after* μετὰ *three days*. When it is followed by a genitive, as here, it is rendered as *with* or *among*.

The prepositional phrase here is μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων in its entirety. While μετὰ πάντων (*with all*) could theoretically stand alone, the addition of τῶν ἁγίων specifies exactly who the *all* refers to, namely, *the saints* or *holy ones*. The definite article τῶν and the adjective ἁγίων are both in the genitive plural, agreeing with πάντων and completing the thought. αὐτοῦ is functioning as a possessive, indicating that these ἁγίων belong to Jesus.

It would be consistent with NT usage for ἁγίων to refer to God's people.

- Acts 9:13—Lord, *I have heard from everyone about this man, how viciously he has treated your saints τοῖς ἁγίοις σου in Jerusalem.*
- Acts 9:32—As Peter was in the process of travelling among them all, he went down and visited the saints τοὺς ἁγίους who were living in Lydda.
- Eph. 1:1—Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus—by God's choice—to the holy people τοῖς ἁγίοις who are in Ephesus.

It is also true that if Paul has Matthew 25:31 (*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels οἱ ἄγγελοι with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne.*) in mind, he could be talking about angels.

¹ N.T. Wright believes that while heaven is real and significant, it is not the final destination for God's people. Instead, he argues for a future hope centered on bodily resurrection and the renewal of creation, where heaven and earth are fully

united under God's reign.

N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

It may be that we do not have to choose. It is possible that at his return, Jesus will come with both his people who have died and gone to heaven as well as his angels.

Jesus' Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew by Paul in This Verse
25:31 When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him , then he will sit upon his glorious throne.	3:13 until the return of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones .
<p>24:31 what will be the sign of your return παρουσία and the end of the age?</p> <p>24:27 as lightening comes from the east and shines over to the west, so will be the return παρουσία of the Son of Man.</p> <p>24:37 just as the days of Noah were, so also will be the return παρουσία of the Son of Man.</p> <p>24:39 so also will be the return παρουσία of the Son of Man.</p>	3:13 Paul uses the word παρουσία to describe the return of Jesus.

Chapter 4

4:1

So then, brothers and sisters, we ask you—implore you—by the Lord Jesus that just as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, even as you have been doing, you do even more.

Λοιπὸν οὖν *So then.* λοιπός is typically rendered as *furthermore* or *finally*. If λοιπός was occurring at the end of the letter, I would render it that way as well. The PB leaves it untranslated, preferring instead to translate οὖν as *So then*, clarifying that the practical and concrete commands in this chapter flow naturally from Paul's desire that they be *blameless in holiness before our God* (3:13). NIV renders the entire phrase as *As for other matters*.

ἀδελφοί *brothers and sisters.* Unless the context indicates that only men are being addressed, it is appropriate to translate this masculine plural noun as *brothers and sisters*.

ἔρωτῶμεν ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν *we ask and implore you.* This phrase is a bit striking in that it departs from the usual Greek preference for using an indicative verb + a participle where we in English would use two indicative verbs. Here, two indicative verbs are used, joined by καὶ.

The meaning of these verbs is close enough that it reads a bit oddly to translate it word for word: *we ask and implore*. The PB attempts to replicate the rhythms of spoken English here by using an em-hyphen to introduce a pause. In spoken English, it would be quite fine to have redundancy in the verbs as long as there is a little pause included.

NET, on the other hand, goes with a bit more mechanical translation here, regardless of how it sounds in English: *we ask you and urge you*.

ὑμᾶς is, of course, in the accusative case because it is the direct object of the two verbs.

Paul makes his request **ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ**, *in the Lord Jesus*. In 2:7, there is a discussion of Paul's applying to himself the title of *apostle*, and what this might have meant in first century culture.

In light of that discussion, one could almost translate this phrase in 4:1 as Paul making his request *with the delegated authority of Jesus himself*. While this is probably what he meant by ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ, it would require a lot of footnoting in your version to explain how Paul perceived himself to have received a full power-of-attorney to speak on behalf of Jesus.

ἵνα καθὼς παρελάβετε παρ' ἡμῶν τὸ πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν καὶ ἀρέσκειν θεῷ
that just as you received from us /learned from us how you ought to live and to please God.

ἵνα καθὼς παρελάβετε is straightforward and easy to translate: *that just as you received*. παρ' ἡμῶν τὸ πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν is more challenging.

παρά is shortened to παρ' because the following word begins with a vowel. This is a preference not unlike our English preference, in spoken language at least, to shorten *cannot* into *can't*.

It is followed by the genitive ἡμῶν, which indicates that Paul intended this to be understood as *from us*.

τὸ is accusative, and so signals that what follows is the direct object of the verb παρελάβετε. What did they receive from Paul and his friends? They received *the how it is necessary for you to walk / to live*. In the NT, the verb *to walk* often refers to one's *entire lifestyle*, to one's *manner of living*.

In Koine Greek, δεῖ followed by an infinitive is an idiomatic expression, commonly used to express necessity or obligation, typically translated as *it is necessary to* or *one must*. The infinitive that follows δεῖ is known as a complementary infinitive, as it completes the meaning of the verb.

When we translate this to English *You must do (this action)*, it seems as though *You* ought to be in the nominative case. However, in this Greek structure, it will be δεῖ + infinitive + accusative-noun-or-pronoun.

The use of τὸ in front of πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν turns that whole phrase into a verbal noun: *how you ought to live*.

καὶ ἀρέσκειν θεῷ *and to please God*. It would seem that the dative θεῷ ought to be the accusative θεόν, since it is the direct object of the verb *to please*. That is, *to please who or what? God!* However, the verb ἀρέσκω typically takes a dative object rather than an accusative.

While this seems quirky, it seems a tiny bit less irregular if we think of the phrase as *being pleasing to God* or *finding favor with God* rather than directly *pleasing God* as a direct object.

καθὼς καὶ περιπατεῖτε *just as you are doing / have been doing*. As we have seen several times in 1 Thessalonians so far, καὶ is acting as an intensifier rather than a conjunction. If anybody in the Greek world had yet thought of using underlining as a technique for adding emphasis, then Paul might have written καθὼς περιπατεῖτε. But since that option was not open to him, he added καὶ.

The first ἵνα clause in this verse introduces the purpose of Paul's request and exhortation. The final ἵνα clause expresses the ultimate purpose of Paul's exhortation: **ἵνα περισσεύητε μᾶλλον** *that you do even more!*

Paul used a subjunctive mood in περισσεύητε rather than the indicative mood he used in περιπατεῖτε in the previous phrase. First, it is a standard construction in Koine Greek for ἵνα + subjunctive to indicate purpose or intended result ("in order that"). The surprise is not that the second ἵνα is followed by a subjunctive, but that the first ἵνα in this verse was **not** followed by a subjunctive.

However, the first ἵνα was followed by a description of current reality—a factual situation. This clearly made Paul feel that an indicative mood verb was appropriate.

But in this second ἵνα clause, there is a future orientation, plus an air of potentiality. They have not yet *done even more*. Hence, a subjunctive is appropriate.

It is also true that in Greek, the subjunctive is sometimes used instead of an imperative to express a command. Paul may have been intending for the Thessalonians to understand multiple nuances in this verb.

Paul isn't merely stating the purpose (*in order that you might excel*) but is actively encouraging and urging the Thessalonians toward this goal (*let you excel more and more*). This dual aspect fits perfectly with the overall tone of the verse, where Paul is both teaching and exhorting.

4:2

You know what sort of commands we gave you by the delegated authority of the Lord Jesus.

διὰ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ *by the delegated authority of the Lord Jesus* could naturally be rendered as *through the Lord Jesus*, since διὰ is being followed by a genitive noun. However, that rendering does not quite make sense.

More likely, it means much the same thing as ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ meant in 4:1. And so indeed is it understood this way by the NIV, which renders this verse *For you know what instructions we gave you **by the authority of the Lord Jesus***. So also the GNT and NLT.

4:3

For this is the will of God: that you come to resemble him in your character, which involves you abstaining from sexual immorality,

τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ *for this is the will of God*. The conjunction γάρ provides an explanatory connection to the preceding verses, indicating that what follows elaborates on or supports the previous content. By now, you should be expecting to see γάρ as the second word of its sentence, as this is the standard way of using this word in Ancient Greek.

This is (the) will. We see here another instance of an equative nominative. That is, a nominative pronoun or noun τοῦτο connected by a be-verb ἐστιν to another nominative noun or pronoun θέλημα. Check the Index at the back for other instances of this construction in 1 Thessalonians.

τοῦ θεοῦ expresses a very common use of the genitive—to capture what we do in English with the word *of* or with the apostrophe-s of a possessive. Hence, *this is God's will* or *this is the will of God*.

If you have been translating your way through 1 Thessalonians, you know that θεός and ὁ θεός are totally equivalent to each other. The Greek article is a good bit more multi-faceted than the English article *the*. It sometimes appears before names, as in Acts 18:14 before Gallio's name ὁ Γαλλίων, and other times without the article before names, as in Acts 18:12, also before Gallio's name Γαλλίωνος.

Careful students of the NT have tried to determine if there is a patterns to when θεός is used without the article, while other times it appears ὁ θεός. I have seen

no satisfactory theories. The more important thing to do is to realize that the Greek article *ὁ* is only slightly equivalent to the English article *the*.

ὁ ἁγιασμός ὑμῶν *your holiness* extends the equative nominative construction. *This ≈ will (of God) ≈ your holiness/sanctification.*

ἁγιασμός is a challenge to translate for 21st century English speakers. Not one Canadian in a thousand knows what *sanctification* is (and this includes many people who are church go-ers), and *holiness* is hardly better.

The PB tries to build on the notion that holiness is an essential aspect of the character of God, and that when we become holy we are coming to be more like God. Hence, (ἐστιν) **ὁ ἁγιασμός ὑμῶν** *that you come to resemble him in your character.*

In other parts of this epistle, the PB goes ahead and uses the word *holiness* because it is simply too awkward to do anything else. Here, however, an alternate rendering is possible.

ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας *your abstaining from sexual immorality.* ἀπέχεσθαι illustrates the verbal-noun character that infinitives can exhibit. It is a noun, but is functioning here like a noun that captures part of the meaning of *holiness*.

ἀπέχεσθαι is a middle infinitive. This is one of the verbs that has a different translation in the middle voice than in the active voice. Here it means *to abstain/abstaining*. ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας is a prepositional phrase *from sexual immorality*.

When I was in junior high school, we lived in a town of 10,000 people, and went to a little Baptist church where I can recall people praying, *O Lord, we want to live just like the first century Christians lived.*

Even at age 13, I can recall thinking *Wait a moment! Have you people even **read** the Bible? If God answers this prayer, the police may haul off the pastor of our church and send him to prison, or possibly even beat him to death. There could be people in our church as there were in the seven churches described in Revelation 2-3 who would be teaching that all sorts of sexual immorality was OK and was even God-honoring.*

I found the latter thought unbelievable at the time. Yet here, some 60 years later we are in exactly this situation.

It is uncanny the extent to which our culture has become like that of the first century Roman Empire, with widespread sexual misbehavior and homosexual practice. According to Paul, one cannot fulfill the will of God—one cannot follow Jesus—without it touching on sexual behavior.

In Scripture, it does not appear that God defines certain practices as *sin* based on a whim. Rather, it is because these practices are in some way corrosive of the individual or corrosive in the relationships between people. We are all pretty well agreed that gossip, bitterness, and theft are corrosive in some way or other, and are comfortable calling them *sin*.

The issue with behaviors the Bible calls sexual sin...

Examples could include:

Lev. 18:22—*You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.*

Rom. 1:26-27—*For this reason God gave them over to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged the natural sexual relations for unnatural ones, and likewise the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed in their passions for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

1 Cor. 6:9-10—*Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

...is that we have a number of people in our culture who call these same behaviors wholesome and loving.

It may be that we will need to wait 30 or 40 years for the corrosive consequences of homosexuality to become evident. Prior to that, we may elect to trust that God does not call behaviors *sin* for no reason, and that he has our good in mind at all times.

That is the positive reason. Of course, one can also ask about evidence in Scripture about how peeved God gets when his commands are ignored.

As an aside, while talking about sexuality in the first century Roman Empire, there are a series of carvings in the Marble Road in Ephesus that are considered one of the earliest known examples of commercial advertising.



The footprint is accompanied by several other symbols, including:

- A cross (faintly visible)
- A woman's figure
- A heart
- A money purse
- A library
- A hole in the rock

Scholars interpret this combination of symbols as an advertisement for the nearby brothel.¹ The meaning is generally understood as follows:

At the crossroads, opposite the library, a woman's love can be purchased if:

- Your foot is at least as large as the carved footprint
- You have enough coins to fill the carved hole

In any case, Paul including this tells us that issues around sexual behavior were an issue in 1st century Thessalonica, just as they are in 21st century Canada.

This may be a good time to go back to the *Introduction* to this commentary, and review the section called *To Whom Was This Letter Written, Why, and When?*

4:4

and to know, each of you, how to get his sexual desires under control, in holiness and honor.

This verse carries on from 4:3, and further unpacks what God's will for the Believer is.

εἰδέναι ἕκαστον ὑμῶν *to know, each of you, or each of you to know.* Where a Greek infinitive is used in such a way that it requires a subject, that subject will be in the accusative case rather than the nominative. In this verse, ἕκαστον is the subject of the infinitive εἰδέναι.

τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκευὸς κτᾶσθαι *to control his own vessel.* The nominative singular form σκευὸς is identical, in this neuter noun, to the accusative singular: σκευός. The singular neuter form of the article is also the same in the nominative and the accusative: τό.

The reason STEP Bible defines τὸ σκευός as accusative in its word analysis has everything to do with context rather than the strict word-form. From the context, it virtually has to be the direct object of the infinitive κτᾶσθαι.

¹ Marko Pečina, Ivo Bojanić, and Tomislav Smoljanović, *The Oldest Known Case of a Flat Foot from Ancient Ephesus*, International Orthopaedics 37, no. 12 (December 2013):

2433–2437.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00264-013-2025-z>.

There is a difference of opinion as to what Paul means by τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι. One school of thought is that it means *to live with your wife*. So GNT and CEV. However, the word σκεῦος is used elsewhere in the NT to mean *possession*,¹ *merchandise*,² or *kitchen utensil*.³ This understanding is out of step with the NT view of marriage, and of women generally, and implies that a wife is merely a sexual object who is possessed by her husband.⁴

It is more likely that Paul was using σκεῦος as a euphemism for genital organs or sexual desire. We do exactly the same thing today, referring to one's *equipment* or *private parts* rather than talking about penises and vaginas.

This would lead us to render this phrase along the lines of *to gain mastery over his body* or *to control his sexual desires*. So the NIV and NLT.

Further support for this sort of rendering is that understanding Paul's command this way means that it applies equally to men and women, and to those of all ages—not just the men who are married.

ἐν ἀγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ *in holiness and honor* is a prepositional phrase where ἐν governs both ἀγιασμῷ and τιμῇ, which consequently are both in the dative case.

This verse serves to make concrete just what Paul was wanting for the Thessalonian believers in 3:13 and 4:1. The combination of εἰδέναι with κτᾶσθαι creates a construction that emphasizes that knowledge and practical application are intertwined with each other.

4:5

Do not allow yourself to be dominated by lustful passions, like people who do not know God.

μὴ ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας *not in lustful passion*. πάθος (here in the dative form πάθει) connotes *passion* or *strong desire*. ἐπιθυμίας is in the genitive case, *of lust*, and defines what kind of πάθος is being discussed.

In Greek, this verse is part of a sentence that began in verse 3. It continues to unpack what Paul means by becoming *holy*, or as the PB says, in *coming to*

¹ Matt. 12:29

² Mark 11:16

³ Rom. 9:21

⁴ Wanamaker, *op. cit.*, 152. So also F.F. Bruce, *Thessalonians*, *op. cit.*, 83.

resemble God in our character. The PB begins a new verse with 4:5 to improve readability in English.

καθάπερ καὶ *just as or even as.* **καθάπερ** appears to be the operative conjunction here, which leaves καὶ as an intensifier—a function we have seen it perform several times in this epistle so far.

τὰ ἔθνη *people or pagans.* In 2:16 there is an extensive discussion on the challenge of rendering the word ἔθνος for 21st century readers.

τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν θεόν *the ones who have not known God.* This phrase, introduced by the article τὰ, functions like an adjective, giving more information about τὰ ἔθνη. εἰδότα is a perfect participle. The most common use of the perfect tense is to describe something that was true in the past which has continuing implications into the present. So Paul is talking about people who did not know God yesterday, and they still do not know God today, and this affects their behavior right now. They are in a settled state of ignorance rather than suffering from a temporary lack of knowledge

Even though the article of τὰ μὴ εἰδότα turns the participle into a noun, the participle still retains some verb-like qualities. Consequently τὸν θεόν is in the accusative case as the direct object of the verbal-noun *those who do not know.*

Sexual ethics and behavior were clearly an issue for the Thessalonian believers, as they are in virtually every congregation today. Our culture generally tells us the exact opposite thing from Paul—that it is a good thing (it is *freeing*) to be dominated by lustful passions.

Occasionally, however, even in the culture at large, there is a bit of introspection as to where *lustful passions* can lead. The cover article from *Time Magazine*, April 11, 2016 was entitled *Porn and the Threat to Virility*.¹

¹ Time Magazine, *Porn and the Threat to Virility*, Internet Archive, April 11, 2016. <https://archive.org/details/>

time-april-11-2016/page/42/mode/lup?view=theater.



A growing number of young men are convinced that their sexual responses have been sabotaged because their brains were virtually marinated in porn when they were adolescents,¹ leading to what some are calling PIED, porn induced erectile dysfunction. It is hugely destructive to relationships, making it hard to sustain a marriage—and doubly destructive to the self-confidence of young women. Standing naked before a man, and then finding that rather than having sex

¹ Ibid., 42.

together, he prefers to go off and have a bit of quality time alone in the basement with his computer—this is a bad thing.

These men, and the thousands of others who populate their websites with stories of sexual dysfunction, are all at pains to make it clear that they are not antisex. *The reason I quit watching porn is to have **more** sex*, says Deem. *Quitting porn is one of the most sex-positive things people can do.*¹

This does add a good bit of substance to the conviction that God does not define certain behaviors as *sin* because he wants to suck the fun out of our lives. On the contrary, avoiding sin seems to be the way to a richer, fuller experience of life—including more fun while having sex.

4:6

Do not sin by taking advantage of your brother or sister in this matter since the Lord is an avenger concerning all of these things, just as we told you earlier and warned you.

τὸ μὴ ὑπερβαίνειν *not overstepping boundaries*. The verb is a compound one, formed from ὑπέρ (over) and βαίνω (to go, walk). The BDAG lexicon defines ὑπερβαίνω² as *to transgress by going beyond proper limits in behavior*, but this is very difficult to work into a smooth English translation. It is easier simply to go with the LSJ lexicon definition of this word³ and use *to sin*.

The article τὸ plus the infinitive ὑπερβαίνειν turns the infinitive into a verbal noun.⁴ I found it difficult to render it as a noun in this verse. But it is clear that the phrase as a whole continues to elaborate on what constitutes God's will.

καὶ πλεονεκτεῖν ἐν τῷ πράγματι τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ *and to take advantage of your brother or sister in this matter*. The phrase ἐν τῷ πράγματι points to the immediately preceding context, making it clear Paul is still talking about sexual behavior.

As with other instances in the use of ἀδελφός in this letter, unless the context makes it clear that only men are being spoken to, it is appropriate to translate

¹ Ibid., 42f.

² Definition #2.

³ Definition I.2.

⁴ We do this in English with the sentence, *Running is a healthy hobby*. Running is a verb, but it is being used as a noun—as the subject of this sentence.

it as *brother or sister*. God's standards for sexual purity apply to all of God's people, men and women alike.

διότι ἔκδικος κύριος περὶ πάντων τούτων *in as much as the Lord is an avenger of these sorts of behavior/of all of these things.*

This is a sobering phrase. There is no question that God's grace is available to his people, and his forgiveness is a daily reality in our lives. But if we ever become unrepentant—or if we somehow redefine discipleship in such a way as to allow for sexual promiscuity, as some of the church people did in Revelation chapters 2 and 3—we are in deep, deep trouble.

If you have access to some other commentaries on 1 Thessalonians, you will observe that some commentators think that this verse, with its talk of not taking advantage of another believer, is about business ethics. But with the phrase **περὶ πάντων τούτων** concerning all these things, Paul seems to be pointing to the immediate context rather than starting a brand new thought.

In addition, the verses that wrap around verse 6, 4:3-5 and 4:7, are all talking about sexual behavior. So I think it is very clear that sexual morality is what this verse has in view as well.¹

καθὼς καὶ προείπαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ διεμαρτυράμεθα *just as we told you before and warned you.* Paul persists in using a conjunction like **καθὼς** and then following it with **καὶ**. We know that **καὶ** can be used as an intensifier, so maybe it was as though Paul was doing the equivalent of using an iPhone and **WRITING A TEXT MESSAGE IN ALL CAPS**. Perhaps Paul was imagining what he would say and how he would say it if he were there in person in Thessalonica, and he felt that he would have been raising his voice.

ὑμῖν is in the dative case because it is the indirect object of the verb. Paul is saying *we spoke earlier to you ὑμῖν*.

¹ You may be inclined to say *Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but why should I believe Bob Goethe?* This is a good question.

First, you should look at the context yourself and make a decision. Second, F.F. Bruce and Charles Wanamaker both agree that this verse is carrying on

with Paul's discussion of lust and sexuality.

There are times I have disagreed with F.F. Bruce, but those times are rare. And I need to have a pretty good reason for going down that road.

It is intriguing that Paul was only with the Thessalonians for a few weeks—and yet he found time to teach about sexual behavior among those who follow Jesus.¹ This contrasts with the churches I have been a member of over the past two or three decades, where infidelity and promiscuity seldom come up in teaching. We talk about prayer a lot. And one congregation I was a member of preached twice a year on Acts 2 (*And they had all things in common*) but never once in seven years on promiscuity or divorce.

This was possibly related to two of the pastoral staff having been divorced themselves and the third pastor married to a divorced person.

But really, who better to talk about Jesus' teachings on divorce than somebody who has been through it—unless all they have to say is that *I still have unrepented-of sin in my life around this, and probably ought to take a leave of absence from the pastorate*.

Rather than actively avoiding the teachings of Jesus, they would have done better to have read David Instone-Brewer's helpful insights into the OT texts² and its followup.³

This would have been doubly helpful in that a significant percentage of the congregation were divorced and remarried.

This gap in our teaching—this contrast between what Paul talked about and what we do—seems to not be unique to Canada. I asked the Perplexity Pro AI if there were any patterns in HIV/AIDS incidence in Africa. It replied that Protestant Christian denominations appeared to have a HIGHER rate of HIV/AIDS than the population at large.

It is hard to say whether we have otherwise godly churches with a gap in the teaching about discipleship, or whether we are kidding ourselves about our congregations following Jesus at all. In a 2019 web post, David Ayers reports on

¹ προείπαμεν, from προλέγω, we told you earlier.

² David Instone-Brewer, *What God Has Joined*, Christianity Today, October 2007. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2007/10/what-god-has-joined/>.

³ David Instone-Brewer, *More from David Instone-Brewer on Divorce*, Christianity Today, October 22, 2007. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2007/10/more-from-david-instone-brewer-on-divorce/>.

study data indicating that by age 22, 50% of never-married evangelicals in the United States have already had four or more sexual partners.¹

It is worth going back in the commentary on this verse and reviewing the comments about grace, forgiveness, and repentance, which appear immediately below the phrase διότι ἔκδικος κύριος περὶ πάντων τούτων.

4:7

For God has not called us to live in immorality, but for our character to reflect his own.

οὐ γὰρ ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ *For God did not call us for impurity/uncleanness/immorality.* γὰρ is a conjunction that always appears as the second word in the sentence, and that provides an explanation or reason for what has been previously stated. The reason is that God has not called us ἐπὶ for the purpose of ἀκαθαρσίᾳ *immorality*.

The direct object ἡμᾶς is in the expected accusative case, indicating who receives the action of God's calling.

ἐπὶ is always a challenge to render, as it has such a broad lexical range. It was a general-purpose preposition in first century Greek that could carry any of several meanings. In the BDAG lexicon, definition 16 says that when followed by a dative, ἐπὶ can indicate purpose, and be rendered as *for*. It specifically mentions 1 Thess. 4:7 as being an example where ἐπὶ has this meaning.²

Paul indicated the subject of the verb by using the nominative case for ὁ θεός. He includes the article ὁ for reasons that are too subtle for us to puzzle out

¹ To speak more precisely, 52% of the young men, and 43% of the young women.

David J. Ayers, "Sex and the Single Evangelical", Institute for Family Studies, 14 August 2019, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/sex-and-the-single-evangelical>.

We will go ahead and call these promiscuous people *evangelicals*, even though a reading of 1 Thessalonians might make you wonder if they have actually ever been born again.

² If you have not already done so, now is a good time to go to the chapter called

Translation Helps and read the section entitled *Prepositions and Lexicons*.

Particularly notice, at the end of that section, Rodney Decker's exhortation to buy BDAG (sell your car if necessary!) and learn to use it. You will not regret your purchase.

You can download the free basic Logos software package, and then add the BDAG for a couple of hundred dollars. While this is a significant investment, it's actually less expensive than many print editions.

today. There are many times that θεός appears with a ὁ before it, as here, and other times when it does not. For instance:

- John 1:1—καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος *and the Word was God*.
- 1 Tim. 2:5—εἷς γὰρ θεός *for there is one God*.
- Lk. 20:38—θεὸς δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν νεκρῶν ἀλλὰ ζώντων *God is not (God) of the dead but of the living*.

We keep looking for a meaningful pattern. But perhaps whether to include the article or not was simply a matter of stylistic variety.

καθαρότης comes from the adjective καθάρος, which means *clean* or *pure*. ἀ— is a negative prefix in Greek, similar to un—¹ or in—² in English. It denotes negation or absence. When combined, ἀκαθαρότης means *not clean* or *impure*.

In New Testament usage, ἀκαθαρότης is primarily used to denote moral impurity, especially in the context of sexual immorality, lustful living, and behaviors contrary to God's holiness.

ἀλλ' ἐν ἁγιασμῷ *but for holiness*. By this time, we are unsurprised to find that when the following word starts with a vowel, ἀλλά drops its final ἄ and becomes ἀλλ'.

At the head of its truly extensive entry on ἐν, the BDAG lexicon says The uses of this preposition are so many and various, and often so easily confused, that a strictly systematic treatment is impossible. The earliest listeners/readers, not being inconvenienced by grammatical and lexical debates, would readily absorb the context and experience little difficulty.

So to we have little difficulty. ἀλλά sets up a contrast. The first part of the verse says that we have not been called for immorality but—and the preposition ἐν must inevitably understood as—*for* holiness.

There are several references to *being holy* in 1 Thessalonians. Often, the context is such that it is difficult to come up with a translation of ἁγιασμός and related words that does not involve English words like *sanctification* or *holiness*.

¹ As in *unworthy*.

² As in *inflexible*.

In this verse, however, it is possible to consider verses like *As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'* (1 Peter 1:15-16). The PB explores the notion of the individual believer coming to share in the quality of holiness, which is an essential attribute of the character of God.

Hence, the idea that our calling as Believers is *for our character to reflect his own*. This rendering is consistent with what Paul said in 2 Cor. 3:18—*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

4:8

This being the case, the one who ignores what I say here is not ignoring a man, but God—the one who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

τοιγαροὺν *therefore* is a conjunction, indicating that the coming verse flows naturally and logically from the verse(s) that precede it. οὖν is also a conjunction that is used to express *therefore*.

Combining the two words together into one **τοιγαροὺν** *therefore, for that very reason* is a way of making the upcoming logical inference even more emphatic than it would have been otherwise.¹

ὁ ἀθετῶν *the one who ignores this/who rejects this*. Adding the article to this participle makes the verb into a noun, to make it refer to a *person* who rejects Paul's teaching, rather than talking about the action per se. Both words in this article + participle construction are in the nominative case, making clear that this person will be the subject of the verb yet to come.

In Paul's Greek, there is no direct object specified. The English phrase *the one who rejects* virtually requires a direct object to make sense. Hence the PB supplies *what I say here*. The GNT supplies *this teaching*. The NIV supplies *this instruction*.

¹¹ We have seen this before in 1 Thessalonians—that Paul will double conjunctions as a way of adding force to his words.
Perhaps he was a person who used

lots of hand gestures while speaking. When writing, that option was not open to him, so he had to use other techniques to indicate emphasis.

οὐκ ἄνθρωπον ἀθετεῖ *is not ignoring man*. ἄνθρωπον is in the expected accusative case, as it is the direct object of the verb ἀθετεῖ.

ἀλλὰ τὸν θεὸν *but God*. See 4:7 for a discussion of Paul's use of the article with the name of God. The accusative case is used for both objects, ἄνθρωπον and τὸν θεόν, as they both receive the action of the verb ἀθετεῖ.

The conjunctions δέ and καί have multiple functions and don't always indicate contrast, and when they do introduce a contrast, it is often not very forceful. ἀλλὰ *but*, however, is used for sharp contrasts. Paul was trying to be as emphatic here as it is possible to be when writing rather than speaking in person.

τὸν καὶ διδόντα τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ τὸ ἅγιον εἰς ὑμᾶς *the one who gives his Holy Spirit to you*. But now, it will seem repetitive for me to say that καὶ is not being used here as a conjunction but as an intensifier. Basically, Paul was metaphorically shouting as he composed this verse. If he was dictating this letter to a scribe then he was perhaps *actually* shouting as he verbalized this verse.¹

As with ὁ ἀθετῶν earlier in the verse, τὸν διδόντα is an article + participle construction that turns the verb διδόντα into a noun. Hence, *God is **the one who gives***.

There are many ways that adjectives can be associated with nouns.

- ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος *the good man*, with the adjective ahead of the noun.
- ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἀγαθὸς *the good man*, with the adjective after the noun, and the article repeated.
- ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀγαθός *the good man*, with the adjective after the noun, *without* the repeated article.

In 4:8, Paul uses the repeated article to describe τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον *the Holy Spirit*. This phrase appears in the accusative case as the direct object of διδόντα.

¹ Paul could of course have been writing this letter with his own hand. But looking at the contrast between the careful script of the professional scribe—see 1:8 Codex Vaticanus—and the cursive script that most people used—several examples in Chapter 5, in the section *Paul and Matthew's Gospel*—gives us a feel for why a

professional scribe was sometimes used.

<https://www.perplexity.ai/search/are-there-clues-in-the-nt-that-FmT6gEPDRx6RpjSmCHQbiQ#0> lists evidence that Paul may have had vision problems, which would have made the hiring of a scribe even more desirable.

Beyond this, Paul inserts a possessive αὐτοῦ *of him/his* in the middle of this phrase.

εἰς ὑμᾶς *to you*. εἰς is typically translated as *to* or *into* and it is always followed by an accusative noun or pronoun. So then, *God has given his Holy Spirit to you* εἰς ὑμᾶς.

Or *to y'all*, a useful 2nd person plural form a dialect of English spoken in the American southeast. Standard English lacks a distinctive 2nd person plural,¹ which is unfortunate for us as Bible translators.

One hardly knows what to do with the seeming world-wide ignoring of God's demand for sexual purity from his people. If we take Scripture seriously on this, then it implies that a significant percentage of the people in the world that we consider Christians are.... Well, we hardly want to finish that sentence. It is too disturbing to do so. Happily, it is really God's problem to solve. What the status of the Canadian church is, in the eyes of God, is not something I need to concern myself with.

We visited a church once that had a web site where they listed commandments of God around sexuality that should never be talked about or taught, since they might make somebody *feel bad about themselves*. For this church, *feeling bad* was the only sin that needed to be avoided. But again, this was not my problem to solve.

Anybody who wants to ignore the clear and unambiguous commandments of God around sexuality needs to ask themselves just one question: *Do I feel lucky?* See <https://youtu.be/KqgGihIfq5U?si=Dj8KDaWCiRDOLijX>.

My main concern is that if I *myself* am tempted to infidelity or other immorality, my job is to commit myself to reflecting the character of God in my life—to holiness—in both my overt behavior and in my thoughts. Where I fail, my tasks are to repent and to ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen me against temptation.

¹ In Shakespeare's day, there was a distinction. Thou/thee/thy/thine were all

2nd person singular forms. Ye and you were 2nd person plural.

4:9

Now concerning love for each other, we have no need to write to you. For you yourselves are being taught by God to love each other.

Περὶ δὲ φιλαδελφίας *Now concerning brotherly love.* The verse begins with the prepositional phrase **Περὶ δὲ**, a common transitional formula in Paul's letters indicating a shift to a new topic. As in 1:2, **περί** is followed by the genitive case **τῆς φιλαδελφίας**, here meaning *concerning* or *about*. **φιλαδελφίας** is a compound noun combining **φίλος** *love* and **ἀδελφός** *brother*.

οὐ χρειάν ἔχετε γράφειν ὑμῖν *no need you have (for us/for me/for anyone) to write to you.* **χρειάν** is accusative, acting as the direct object of the verb **ἔχετε**. **γράφειν** is what is known as a complementary infinitive, in that it completes—or complements—the meaning of the **χρειάν ἔχετε** construction. In this context, **γράφειν** specifies what they do not have need of, namely, "to write."

αὐτοὶ and **ὁμεῖς** both mean *you*, but when used together emphasize *you yourselves*.

γὰρ is in its accustomed place, as the second word of the phrase, and is rendered *for* or *because*. It provides the reason for the previous statement. So the reason is...

θεοδίδακτοί ἐστε εἰς τὸ ἀγαπᾶν ἀλλήλους *you are God-taught to love each other.* **θεοδίδακτοί** appears to be a word that Paul coined to be used in this letter. It is made of two common words: **θεός** *God* and **διδάκτος** *taught*.

While a new word, it would have been understood immediately. This is not unlike the word *webinar*, coined by Eric R. Korb in 1998, combining *web* and *seminar* to describe online educational presentations or workshops. Another would be *smartphone*, a word coined by the marketing department of Erickson telecom in 1997.

We are beginning to see here the fulfillment of the promise of Isa 54:13 where the LXX contains language similar to Paul. **διδάκτους θεοῦ...τὰ τέκνα σου.** *Your children (will be) taught by God.*

For Paul the age of salvation had begun with Christ's resurrection from the dead, and therefore he may have equated this with the age of salvation described in Isaiah 54.¹

This would make the behavior of the Thessalonians not only good in and of itself, but make it an exciting fulfillment of prophecy, happening (almost) before Paul's very eyes.

θεοδίδακτοί ἐστε is an equative nominative construction, where the subject *You*, though not included as a separate word, is inherent in the 2nd person plural verb ἐστε. ὑμεῖς (which would be in the nominative case if explicitly stated) ≈ θεοδίδακτοί (also in nominative case).

εἰς τὸ ἀγαπᾶν ἀλλήλους uses the article + infinitive τὸ ἀγαπᾶν with εἰς to express purpose or result. Paul may have intended both connotations here. The *reason* they have been God-taught, and indeed the *result* of having been God-taught, is that they love each other ἀλλήλους, which is in the accusative case since it is the direct object of the infinitive.

In this respect, the church in Thessalonica was doing much better than the one in Philippi, where Euodia and Syntyche were at each other's throats. Later, the church in Corinth would be infamous for the lack of love between its members.

So sometimes, even basic love of fellow believers *does* need to be taught.

You might have been a little surprised to find that ἀγαπᾶν was a present active infinitive. With the —ᾶν ending it looks rather like an accusative noun, such as τὴν σοφίαν wisdom.

You are probably familiar with the —εῖν ending for some infinitives. The original form of the infinitive of ἀγαπάω, and the most likely original present active infinitive form was ἀγαπάειν.² As the centuries went by,

¹ Wannamaker, op. cit., 160.

² I was unable to track down a specific reference of an author who used this word-form. But uncontracted forms of verbs are pretty commonly found in Homer, who wrote around 750 B.C. and Herodotus, who wrote c. 430 B.C.

Both Homer and Herodotus wrote in dialects of Ionic Greek, used by Greek speakers on the east side of the Aegean Sea. Koine, in addition to being later, was based on Attic Greek, spoken on the Greek mainland in the region of Athens.

ἀγαπάειν contracted into ἀγαπᾶν. This is not unlike how in English *cannot* has more commonly appeared—at least in spoken English—as *can't*.

This is all you need to know to recognize ἀγαπᾶν as an infinitive. But if you are the kind of person who not only wants to know the time, but to figure out how a wrist-watch is constructed, you can read the Fine Print section that immediately follows.

The Fine Print

Although the alpha in αῖν is considered a short vowel, and the alpha in ᾶν is considered a long vowel, modern English readers of Ancient Greek normally pronounce the long and short alphas the same.

In Paul's day, any vowel marked by a circumflex accent would be considered long, and would be pronounced with a rise followed by a falling pitch.

This change in pitch, which made Ancient Greek rather musical to listen to, is why Ancient Greek is called a polytonic (many tones) language. The accents all marked differences in pitch.

Acute Accent (´): Indicated a rising pitch on the syllable.

Grave Accent (`): Represented a falling pitch, typically used on the final syllable of words in a sentence.

Circumflex Accent (^): Denoted a rise and fall in pitch within the same syllable, only used on long vowels or diphthongs.

Between the 2nd and 4th centuries, however, the musical qualities of Greek started to disappear, with all three accents simply marking which syllable in a word should get the stress. By the 4th century, Greek had become a monotonic (non-musical) language, and the three accents were retained only for historical reasons.¹

¹ We retain silent letters in written English for similar historical reasons. Our spelling

was frozen in time even as pronunciation continued to change over the centuries.

If you had a time machine, and could go back to any point in history, you would probably find it easier to speak Greek to John Chrysostom¹ (who lived 347 to 407) than to Paul himself. Paul was still speaking Greek with pitch changes—making his Greek musical sounding—while Chrysostom was using stressed syllables more similar to how we pronounce Greek today.

4:10

You are indeed doing this towards the Christians in all of Macedonia, but we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do this, always, even more.

καὶ γὰρ *for indeed*. This combination καὶ γὰρ is common in Koine Greek and can be translated as *for indeed* or *and in fact*.

ποιεῖτε αὐτό *you are doing this*. αὐτός is a versatile word. It can function as a personal pronoun such as he/she/him/her/it. It can function as an intensive pronoun, such as himself/herself/itself. It can function as a demonstrative pronoun, similar to *this* or *that*.

The precise interpretation of αὐτός often depends on its case, position in the sentence, and the broader context. Its flexibility allows for nuanced expression in Greek texts, but can also present challenges for translators and interpreters seeking to capture its full meaning in other languages.

In this context, rendering it as a demonstrative pronoun *this* is the most natural use of the word.

εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς τοὺς ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ *towards the Christians in all of Macedonia*. I was left asking myself how on earth this new church could show love to people in such a large area, and in only a few months. I found that the commentary written by Charles Wannamaker was enormously helpful at this point.

One feature of Paul's missionary activity was to link his various missionary churches together on a regional basis so that they would provide mutual

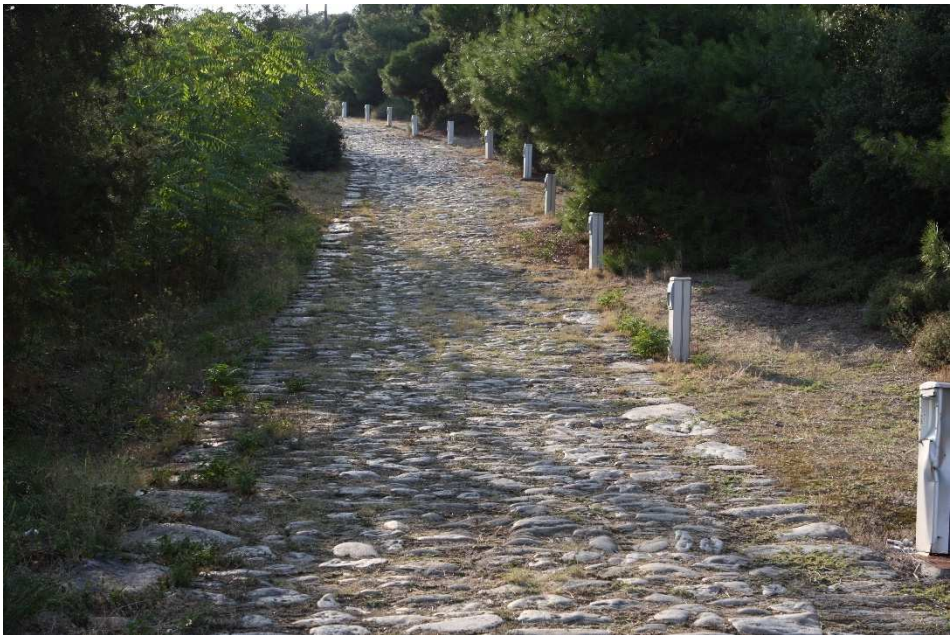
¹ As a preacher, Chrysostom was enormously loved, like John Piper, Tim Keller, and Billy Graham all rolled together into one. When it was decided that he

would leave Antioch and go to pastor in Constantinople, he left in secret for fear that there would be rioting in the streets.

support (see 1 Cor. 16:1, 19; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2), both material and psychological.

At a ... practical level it meant that Christians traveling between cities could obtain hospitality from their brothers and sisters in places where they knew no one. This is exactly what Paul asks of the Roman Christians for Phoebe, a sister and servant of the church at Cenchreae in Achaia (Rom. 16:1f.). In all probability then the Thessalonians had demonstrated their love for their Christian brothers and sisters in Macedonia by providing hospitality for them when they visited Thessalonica, a major port and commercial center as well as the seat of Roman administration for the province.¹

In addition to being a port city, Thessalonica lay on the *Via Egnatia*, a major east-west road that connected the Aegean Sea with the Adriatic Sea and Italy. Thessalonica was thus in a strategic position and saw a huge amount of traffic.



By Philipp Pilhofer - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=20987866>

¹ Wanamaker, op. cit., 161.

Above is a picture of a portion of the Via Egnatia which still exists today.

While the Romans looked to Greece for philosophical writings, they were themselves the masters of civil engineering. Where a road for the Greeks was simply a worn-down cart path, the Romans built a road using layers.

Excavation: Workers dug a trench down to bedrock or firm ground.

Foundation layers:

- *Pavimentum*: A layer of fine, compacted earth.
- *Statumen*: Large, flat stones set in cement, about 30 cm deep.
- *Rudus*: A layer of concrete made from broken stones and lime, about 20 cm thick.
- *Nucleus*: Finer concrete made of lime, chalk, and broken tiles or gravel, 5 cm deep.

Surface layer :

- Large stone slabs, carefully fitted together.
- Sometimes polygonal or rectangular in shape.
- Thickness varied from 25 cm to over 150 cm, depending on expected traffic.¹

εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς *to all the brothers and sisters* is a garden-variety prepositional phrase. εἰς followed by an accusative plural adjective and noun.

τοὺς ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ *in all of Macedonia* is more interesting to render. In 4:8 there is a discussion of the various ways that adjectives can be connected to the nouns they describe. One of those ways is the article-noun-article-adjective construction, as in ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἀγαθὸς *the good man*.

That is the construction we have in this verse, except that rather than a conventional adjective, we have a prepositional phrase acting as an adjective. ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ *in all (the) Macedonia* has an ἐν followed by a dative. The

¹ Description generated by www.Perplexity.ai. While a durable road surface that has lasted, in some places, for

two millennia, it looks like driving on it with a wagon would rattle your kidneys.

whole phrase is tagged as being an adjective by the accusative article τοὺς following the noun τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς.

A wooden rendering of this would be εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς τοὺς ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ *to all the brothers the (ones) in all the Macedonia*. In proper English, using *all* twice in a single sentence is cumbersome. So this becomes *to the Christians in all of Macedonia*.

παρακαλοῦμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, περισσεύειν μᾶλλον, *But we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do more*. ὑμᾶς is an accusative plural pronoun which served as the direct object of the verb παρακαλοῦμεν. We ask/urge/implore. Who do Paul, Silas and Timothy urge? They are urging *you* ὑμᾶς.

Part of the reasons the SBLGNT editor started a new sentence with παρακαλοῦμεν is that δὲ typically appears as the second word in a sentence.

Since there is nothing in the context to indicate that Paul is calling on only the men to show love, it is most appropriate to translate ἀδελφοί as *brothers and sisters*.

You may wonder, if ὑμᾶς is accusative, why ἀδελφοί is not accusative as well, to agree in case with ὑμᾶς.

But if you look at the word analysis in STEP Bible, you will see that ἀδελφοί is not tagged as being nominative plural (though it *looks* like a nominative plural), but rather as a vocative plural case—which is identical in form to the nominative plural. Vocative is the case (which occasionally has a unique word formation, but which often is the same as the nominative) used when you are speaking directly to somebody—as Paul et al are doing to the Thessalonians here.

The infinitive περισσεύειν functions as a complementary infinitive, completing the meaning of παρακαλοῦμεν. The adverb μᾶλλον modifies περισσεύειν, indicating although they are already doing a good job of showing love to other believers, Paul wants them to do even more.

4:11

Be ambitious!...ambitious to live quietly, and mind your own business, to work with your own hands, just as we taught you,

In Greek, this sentence starts in 4:10b, and has the main verb of παρακαλοῦμεν. There are many things that Paul urges the Thessalonians. He urges them to love more all the time **καὶ φιλοτιμεῖσθαι** *and to be ambitious*. Paul follows his command to be ambitious with three infinitives that help to unpack what Paul wants them to be ambitious *about*.

He wants them to be ambitious **ἡσυχάζειν** *to live quietly*, **καὶ πράσσειν τὰ ἴδια** *and to mind your own business*.

πράσσειν means *to do* or *to act*. You will recall that the Greek article can be translated, depending on the context, as a possessive, such as your/his/her. Hence, we can render **τὰ ἴδια** as *your own*. *To do your own*, left by itself, would make little sense in English¹ Hence, PB renders it as *to mind your own business*.

καὶ ἐργάζεσθαι ταῖς χερσὶν ὑμῶν *and to work with your own hands*. There are several common uses of the dative case that can show up in translation even without an explicit preposition. *In, with, by* are all expressed by datives. In this context *with* makes the best sense. And the genitive plural of you very commonly expresses possession, as in *your*. Hence, *to work with your hands*.

In commanding this, Paul was probably influenced by his old mentor Gamaliel,² who said:

Excellent is the study of the torah when combined with a worldly occupation, for toil in them both keeps sin out of one's mind; But [study of the] Torah which is not combined with a worldly occupation, in the end comes to be neglected and becomes the cause of sin.³

It seems to have been Gamaliel's perception that there was something important and good about ordinary work that kept a teaching ministry from falling off the rails, theologically, and kept the teacher himself solid with God, personally.

¹ Although 50 years ago there was a slang expression to *do your own thing*.

² This is the same Gamaliel who said, in Acts 5:38-39, For if this argument, this movement of theirs, is merely human it will come to nothing. But if it from God, you will not be able to destroy them. On the contrary, you might find yourselves

fighting against God.

In Acts 22:3, Paul indicates that he was trained by Gamaliel.

³ Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), Chapter 2, *Mishnah* 2.
<https://tehillim-online.com/ethics-of-the-fathers/pirkei-avot-translated-into-english>.

Obedying the commands of verse seems a bit of a challenge for many of us today, with our economy so filled with *knowledge jobs*. After all, the study of the torah was, in the first century, a knowledge job as well. But we are poorly positioned today to all have side jobs where we work with our hands, as carpenters, tentmakers, or whatever.

It is true, however, that we can today avoid becoming gossiping busybodies—minding our own business—and can work hard to support ourselves.

It is possible that one outworking of the Thessalonians warped views around the return of Jesus (to be discussed later in this chapter) was that *If Jesus is returning soon, I can just quit my day-job. There is no need to work. You make plenty of money. You can support me*. Paul definitely wanted to say *No* to any tendencies like this.

And if Paul's command is to continue to work hard and earn our own way, even if we believe Jesus is returning soon, that is something that even those of us who are knowledge workers can do.

Martin Luther is often attributed with saying something along the lines of *Even if I knew that the world would end tomorrow, I would still plant my apple tree today*. Luther never said this,¹ but it aligns well with his thinking: that we need to focus on what God wants of us *today*, even if today's task is planning for tomorrow.

Some of us are unemployed. But most of us can *work* even if we do not have paying jobs. Those two things are not precisely the same. That is to say, most of us can do useful work as volunteers even if we do not have a conventional job.

καθὼς ὑμῖν παρηγγείλαμεν *just as we taught you*. It is interesting how many aspects of the Christian life Paul taught about in the few weeks he was present in Thessalonica. The value of minding one's own business and working to support himself—along with the importance of sexual purity—all came up in Paul's teaching, virtually from day one.

If we render the rest of the phrase *just as we taught you*, then you sounds like the direct object of the verb. We wonder why ὑμῖν is a dative instead of an

¹ The *quote* appears to have originated around 1944.

accusative. However, it is possible to render καθὼς παρηγγείλαμε as *just as we gave instruction*, then having ὑμῖν to tag this word as the indirect object of the verb makes perfectly good sense.

It is a striking thing to tell people to be *ambitious* to live quietly and to mind their own business. This is so opposed to the world's way of thinking about ambition.

4:12

so that you may live in such a way so as to gain the respect of unbelievers, and not be dependent on anyone.

ἵνα περιπατῆτε *so that you may live*. While ἵνα is not always followed by a subjunctive verb, ἵνα + a subjunctive is an enormously common way of expressing *purpose* in the NT, as it does here.

περιπατέω may be translated as *to walk about*, but is often used as a metaphor in the NT for one's entire manner of life. The word has come down in English as the uncommon but lovely adjective *peripatetic*, to describe someone who likes to walk or travel around, or who moves from one place to another frequently.

εὐσχημόνως πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω *a respectable life before those who are outside (the Faith)*. That is to say, that you would live *in such a way as to gain the respect of unbelievers*. εὐσχημόνως is derived from εὖ *good* and σχῆμα *form, appearance*. The term carries connotations of both moral uprightness and social respectability Paul wanted believers to have a reputation for honesty and responsible independence.

πρὸς normally connotes *to, toward* or *in relation to*. Here, it indicates the direction or focus of Paul's concern for modest living and hard work. It has to do with the reputation that Christians get in the broader community.

The Greek article has the almost-magical ability to turn any sort of word into a noun. Here τοὺς turns the adverb ἔξω *outside* into a noun, *those who are outside*, or *those who are unbelievers*.

Paul is about to speak about the return of Jesus. This is a totally legitimate and important topic. However, there is something about this topic that today often

brings out the lunatic fringe of the Church.¹ Paul saw this as a first century danger as well, and he wanted to avoid it.

καὶ μηδενὸς χρεῖαν ἔχητε *and that you should have no need of anyone*. This ties back into Paul's concern that people work with their hands. ἔχητε is a subjunctive mood verb, and is also governed by that ἵνα at the beginning of the verse.

χρεῖαν is in the accusative case, and is the direct object of the verb: *so that you should need **nothing***.

The combination of these two elements—respectable behavior and economic independence—suggests that Paul sees them as interconnected aspects of the church's witness and stability in a pagan society.

So what do we do with the lunatic fringe? We cannot completely disavow them, as they are often well-meaning fellow-believers.

I find it helpful, in talking to non-Christians about these sorts of people, to go ahead and verbalize what they are thinking. I find that sort of openness to be disarming, and helpful in leading to a constructive conversation. So I will go ahead and use the phrase *lunatic fringe of Christianity*. The person I am speaking to has thought this. They are shocked—in a good sort of way—to discover that I can affirm their perspective.

I then go on to say, *Yes, we have a lunatic fringe, and frankly it is a bit embarrassing. But it is not unlike going to a family reunion and being embarrassed by a crazy uncle. Yes, he is crazy, and he is embarrassing, but he is still family.*

From that point on, it is usually fairly easy to bring the discussion around to Jesus, since I am neither being defensive of, nor defending the behavior of people who think [fill-in-the-blank] is the Antichrist, and that numerology somehow confirms that identification.

¹ A discussion about demonic power and/or of miracles, both of which are also totally

legitimate and important topics, also has a tendency to surface the lunatic fringe.

4:13

We do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, concerning those who have “fallen asleep” in death, so that you do not grieve the way the others do who have no hope for the future.

When Timothy returned to Paul, he came with a report that for all the positive things about the faith of the Believers in Thessalonica, they did have some concerns. This verse evidently is the answer to a question that the Thessalonian believers had. We must, however, infer just what that question was.

It is great to look forward to the return of Jesus. If that happens immediately, then there is no problem. If it does *not* happen immediately, then the question apparently arose in Thessalonica, *What happens to my friends and family members who die? Jesus is coming back for those of us who wait for him...but what about those who die before that happens?*

It is sobering that this question would arise in just the handful of months since Paul was with them in person. We typically assume our own extended life expectancy was typical in earlier eras. When data from tombstone inscriptions and census data on papyri is taken into account, there are indications that the average life expectancy in the first century Roman Empire was in the mid-20s to early-30s. While there *were* people who lived to age 80, there was an enormous number who died at birth, or in the first 5 or 10 years of life.¹

Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί *We do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters.* δὲ marks the beginning of a new thought for Paul. This verse is not just the beginning of a new paragraph, but of a whole new section, with its own title, in the GNT, NIV, NLT, and ESV.

In Koine Greek, δέ typically appears in the second position of a clause. However, in this case, Οὐ θέλομεν is functioning as a single unit—essentially one complete thought meaning *we do not want*. When compound verbal ideas like this occur, δέ can appear after the complete verbal unit, treating it as a single position.

¹ Mona Tokarek LaFosse, *Considerations of Age and Demography for Early Christ Groups*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 44, no. 3 (2022): 365-387. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X211067851>.

But you do not have to go back that far in time. It is unlikely that I myself would have lived past age 20 had I been born before antibiotics were developed after WW2.

This phenomenon is seen elsewhere in the New Testament where negative particles (like οὐ) combine closely with their verbs to form a unified concept, allowing δέ to follow the entire verbal unit rather than splitting it. The tight connection between οὐ and θέλομεν makes them function grammatically as a single unit for purposes of word order.¹

ὕμᾱς *you* is the accusative plural pronoun, functioning as the direct object of the main verb θέλομεν *We want*. The *We* of *we want* is not included as a separate word but is wired into the 1st person plural verb form.

There was a common Greek noun for knowledge, γνώσις.² From this, the Greeks inferred a verb form γνοέω *to know*.

Now, γνοέω was never a real word that people used. But there is a real word based on appending an ἀ—, for *not* or *without*, to the front of the hypothetical γνοέω. ἀγνοέω means *to not-know*, or *to be ignorant*.

ἀδελφοί *brothers and sisters* is yet another instance of what linguists call the *generic masculine*. This linguistic phenomenon is common in many languages with grammatical gender systems. In such languages, when referring to a mixed group of people or when the gender is unknown or unspecified, the masculine form is often used as the default.

The context is clear, in this instance, that Paul does not want men or women believers to be anxious about Christians who have died. So translating this ἀδελφοί as *brothers and sisters* is appropriate. And once again, Paul is addressing people directly, so ἀδελφοί is tagged as being in the vocative case.

περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων *concerning those who have “fallen asleep” in death*. περὶ followed by a genitive is typically rendered as *concerning*, *about*, or *in regard to*. κοιμωμένων is a genitive participle from the verb κοιμάομαι, *to fall asleep* or *to go to bed*.

¹ Other places where this grammatical phenomena may be seen include Rom. 8:15 and 1 Cor. 15:10.

² From which the English word *Gnostic* is derived.

The use of the verb κοιμάομαι as a euphemism for dying was common in Greek culture.¹ So when Paul used this to talk about believers who had died, his readers would have immediately understood what he was talking about.²

We do this in our culture as well. Expressions we use rather than saying that somebody *died* include:

- Passed
- Departed
- Gone to a better place (which sounds like they won a trip to Disney World).

The article does what it so often does, to turn the participle *sleeping* into a noun *those who are asleep*. The participle is genitive plural masculine, which agrees with the genitive plural masculine article τῶν, and makes it clear that τῶν κοιμωμένων goes with the preposition περὶ.

ἵνα μὴ λυπῆσθε *so that you should not be grieved*. ἵνα introduces a clause that talks about *purpose*—indicating the reason for Paul’s instruction—and we expect it to be followed by a subjunctive verb. So indeed it is with the 2nd person passive subjunctive plural λυπῆσθε.

If the Thessalonian believers had somehow *caused* grief to others, Paul would have used an active voice form of the verb. But since they were the recipients of grief (caused by the death of friends and family members) Paul used a passive voice *be grieved*.

καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα *like the others that have no hope*. This is the fifth time Paul has used καθὼς καὶ in this letter. You will be experienced at translating it as *like* or *just as*.

Once again we encounter the pattern , so common in Koine Greek, of having an article + noun + article + adjective. οἱ λοιποὶ is *the rest* or *the others*. The article

¹ Homer, *Iliad*, op. cit., 11.241.
Sophocles, , “Electra”, In *Sophocles I: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone*, edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), line 509.

Plato, “Apology.” in *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper,

(Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 17-36.

² The English word *cemetery* is derived more-or-less directly from the Greek word κοιμητήριον.

turns the participle ἔχοντες into a noun *those who have*. μὴ negates it, so it become *those who do not have*.

Even though the participle has been turned into a noun by the article, it still retains some verb-like characteristics. Hence ἐλπίδα *hope* is in the accusative case, as it is the direct object of the verb to have.

In Eph. 2:3, οἱ λοιποὶ refers to those in the pagan world. Hence, it refers, there and here, to the same group described in 1 Thess. 4:5, τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν θεόν *the people who do not know God*.

Among the Greek philosophers, at least from the time of Plato onward, there were always some who maintained that the soul was immortal. But they were usually vague about the nature of this immortality. And in any case, beliefs about an afterlife appear not to have been held widely by the population at large.¹ Catullus, a Roman poet who died around 54 B.C., expressed the common pagan view of death.

*soles occidere et redire possunt:
nobis, cure semel occidit brevis lux,
nox est perpetua una dormienda.*

The sun can set and rise again
But once our brief light sets
There is one unending night to be
slept through²

4:14

For if we believe that Jesus certainly died and rose again, we can believe just as certainly that God will bring with him those who have died in Jesus.

εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη *For if we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life.* There is no surprising grammar in this phrase. γὰρ is in its accustomed place, as the second word of the sentence. It connects this verse logically to the preceding discussion, providing the basis for Paul's comforting words to those Thessalonians who were grieving a recent loss.

¹ Wanamaker, op. cit., 167.

² Catullus, Gaius Valerius, *The Poems of Catullus*. Translated by Charles Martin

(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 5.4-6.

εἰ *If* assumes the reality of the condition for the sake of argument. Paul is not questioning whether Jesus died and rose, but rather using this accepted truth as the basis for his argument about deceased believers.

If Paul had wanted to express that the condition was unreal or hypothetical, he could have expressed that by using ἄν in the second half of the sentence. For example:

εἰ ἐπιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη, ὁ θεὸς ἄν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἤγαγεν σὺν αὐτῷ.

If we were believing (but we're not) that Jesus died and rose, God would have brought (but he hasn't) those who have fallen asleep in Jesus with him.

Had Paul used an aorist verb for *believe*, it would have mostly connoted a complete action in the past¹—probably their initial profession of faith. However, he used the present tense for πιστεύομεν, which suggests that he is talking about their ongoing faith, what they actively believe right now.

In contrast, ἀπέθανεν and ἀνέστη are both in the aorist tense. Paul is thinking of both of these as completed events that occurred in the past.

The main verb of the next clause is near the end: ἄξει (*God*) *will bring*. While a typical way of building sentences in Greek was Verb-Subject-Object, Greek authors demonstrated enormous flexibility in their word order.

οὕτως καὶ *in the same way*. For Paul's perspective, we can be as confident of the one thing as of the other.

ὁ θεὸς *God* is in the nominative case, and so is the subject of the verb, the one who does the action of the verb. τοὺς κοιμηθέντας *those who are asleep* is an accusative plural article + participle. The article turns the participle into a noun as far as the sentence is concerned. Hence, the participle *being asleep* becomes the noun *those who are asleep*. As it is in the accusative case, it is the object of the verb. Hence:

God will bring back those-who-are-asleep.

¹ For a discussion of the aorist tense, go to the chapter below on *Translation Helps*, the

section called *Greenwood and the Aorist Tense*.

The active voice of this verb would be used in a sentence talking about a parent who *lulls* their child *to sleep*. The passive voice is used in this sentence, of those to whom sleep happens, rather than something they actively do.

Of course, once we sort out the function of this verb, we may elect to translate it as *those who have died*.

When **διὰ** is followed, as here, by a genitive case noun **τοῦ Ἰησοῦ**, it is normally translated as *through* or *by means of*. But the context is that Paul is reassuring the Thessalonians about their friends and family members who have put their faith in Jesus, and who were waiting for Jesus' return, but who died before Jesus came back.

As we look through BDAG for a rendering that fits with this context, we see that definition A.3.c suggests that Paul could have been talking about those who have died *with* or *in a state of being with* Jesus. In the LSJ, definition A.III.c would also support this sense. This is in keeping with how Paul expressed himself in an almost-parallel way in 1 Cor 15:18, οἱ κοιμηθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ, *those who have died in Christ/within Christ's fellowship*.

BDAG and LSJ do not function like rule books that ancient authors somehow, retroactively, have to adhere to. Rather, they represent the careful observations of hundreds of serious readers of Ancient Greek,¹ built up over a period of decades,² of how ancient authors actually used their language.³

Where the context for a given word might still leave the meaning of a Greek word unclear, the LSJ/BDAG editors will have consulted ancient translations of the passage in question that were made by native Greek

¹ For instance, there was a Dr. E. T. Withington who read every work in Ancient Greek that touched on medicine, and compiled definitions of every medical term. His work appears on almost every page of the LSJ.

An individual named Sir William Thiselton-Dyer developed a specialized lexicon of Greek plant names.

Sir Thomas Heath reviewed all Greek mathematical terms.

² The first edition of what would become known as the LSJ lexicon—still used

today—was published in 1843 by Oxford University Press.

³ And of course, there have been countless articles published on NT words, many of which will have been taken into account by the BDAG editors. A typical example is:

Weima, Jeffrey A. D., 'But We Became Infants Among You': The Case for *νηπιοὶ* in 1 Thess 2.7, *New Testament Studies* 46, no. 4 (2000): 547-564

speakers into languages such as Latin or Syriac. How they translated a given word can give us a clue as to what they understood that original word to mean.

So overall, the BDAG/LSJ can throw an enormous amount of light on how ancient authors used words. And just as we today can distinguish between *He landed the boat on the east **bank*** and *He decided to rob the **bank** at midnight*, ancient readers would immediately sort out what meaning the author had by the context. LSJ and BDAG are our primary resources for getting a feel for all the various contexts in which a given word might occur.

ὁ θεὸς and τοῦ Ἰησοῦ would both be examples of how Greek (sometimes!) puts an article before a name. It is not appropriate that we translate that article in this situation. We are talking about *Jesus*. We are not talking about *the Jesus*. About *God*, and not *the god*.¹

So then, *God ἄξει σὺν αὐτῷ* will lead or bring with him those who have died as Christians.

Jesus' Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew by Paul in This Verse
24:31 Jesus will gather his elect, from one end of heaven to the other ἐπισυνάξουσιν τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς αὐτοῦ...ἀπ' ἄκρων οὐρανῶν ἕως τῶν ἄκρων αὐτῶν.	While 1 Thessalonians 4:14 uses a different verb (ἄξει - "will bring"), both passages describe a divine gathering of God's people in connection with Christ's return.

4:15

We tell you this directly from the Lord: we who remain alive at the time of the return of the Lord will definitely not go ahead of those who have died.

¹ The OT provides the broad context for the NT, and the OT emphasizes over and over again that there is only one true God. The

many gods of the surrounding countries have no substance.

Not only are the dead in Christ OK...but they will join Jesus (slightly) ahead of those of us who are alive at his return. This is good news. Great news!

τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου *For we tell you this by the word of the Lord, or on the authority of the Lord.*¹ The main verb is λέγομεν *we say/speak/tell*. τοῦτο is the accusative direct object of the verb: *we say **this***. ὑμῖν is the dative indirect object of the verb: *we say **this to you***.

If you find yourself a bit fuzzy on the grammatical terms *direct* and *indirect object*, a short but helpful book is Kyle Greenwood, *Dictionary of English Grammar for Students of Biblical Languages* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020).

ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου could either refer to a prophetic revelation received by Paul, or to something Jesus said about this particular issue that people still talked about, some 20 years later. In any case, Paul felt that he could speak unambiguously and with the full delegated authority of Jesus himself on this question.

ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι *that we, the ones living the ones remaining.* ἡμεῖς *we* is a nominative plural noun. By using the nominative case, Paul flags that this word is the subject of the verb that appears later.

οἱ ζῶντες is also nominative plural, which tells us that Paul meant us to understand this as referring back to the nominative plural ἡμεῖς. The article turns the participle *living* into a noun *those who are alive*.

We have seen before the Greek pattern of article-noun-article-adjective, and we see something similar here. οἱ περιλειπόμενοι is also an article followed by a participle, all nominative plural, which makes it clear that it is functioning like an adjective, giving more information about οἱ ζῶντες.

Taken altogether the phrase means *that we who remain alive*.

εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου *until the return of the Lord*. We are accustomed to εἰς being used of location or in some spatial sense, and being rendered as *into* or *in*. But εἰς can also be used as a marker of time, in which case it is usually translated as *until*.

¹ On equating *in the name of the Lord* and *with the delegated authority of the Lord*, see Acts

3:6, Luke 10:17, Jeremiah 11:21, and 1 Samuel 17:45.

εἰς is always followed by an accusative, and so it is here with τὴν παρουσίαν *the return*. You can either render τοῦ κυρίου with the common genitive meaning *of*—the return of the Lord—or the English possessive—*the Lord's return*.

See the remarks at the end of this section on 4:15 for some observations about the word παρουσία.

οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας *will definitely not go ahead of those who have died.*

You may observe that every published translation handles the aorist subjunctive φθάσωμεν—the main verb of this clause—as though it was a future tense.

In Classical Greek, action in future time was typically handled by the future tense. Subjunctive mood verbs dealt in potential action—which is not exactly future time, but has a bit of a future-feel.

This future feeling strengthened over time such that by the time the NT was being written, the aorist subjunctive has started to take over the function of the old future tense—in spite of the aorist indicative being about action in past time.

This transition, with the aorist subjunctive taking over the function of the future tense, continued over the centuries, such that in modern Greek, there is no future tense at all. The aorist subjunctive has taken over all references to future time.

A common construction in first century Greek was οὐ μὴ + aorist subjunctive constructions to express strong future negations. So in this verse, Paul was saying that those of us who remain alive *will definitely not*, or *will absolutely not go ahead of those who have died*.

Jesus' Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew by Paul in This Verse
<p>παρουσία for the return of the Lord is the same word used in:</p> <p>Mt 24:3 As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?"</p> <p>Mt 24:27 For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.</p> <p>Mt 24:37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.</p> <p>Mt 24:39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.</p>	<p>παρουσία is the only word used for the second coming in Jesus' Olivet discourse.</p> <p>It is only used by Matthew.</p> <p>It is also the only word used for the second coming in 1 Thessalonians.</p>

4:16

For the Lord himself, with a loud shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος *For the Lord himself.* If αὐτὸς was alone as the only nominative word, then we would view it as a simple third-person pronoun and translate it

as *he*. However, since there is a nominative article + noun ὁ κύριος present, then we treat it as an intensifier, and translate it as *himself*.¹

ἐν κελεύσματι with a loud shout. Greek speakers always liked to follow ἐν with a dative noun, and so it is here. Κελεύσματι is the dative singular neuter of the noun κέλευσμα.

The preposition ἐν typically means *in* but in this context indicates the means by which something occurs.² Hence, *with* is a better way to render it here.

While *loud* is not inherent in the dictionary definition of κέλευσμα, many English translations include this adjective for several reasons. First, the context describes the dramatic return of Christ, which implies a powerful and attention-grabbing announcement.

Second, κέλευσμα was often used in military contexts for commands given to troops, which were typically shouted to be heard over large distances. Herodotus used this noun in reference the shouted command that a leader gave to tell his troops to engage with the enemy.³ In Thucydides, κέλευσμα is used of the cheer with which the Athenian encouraged one another at the battle of Naupactus (ἀπὸ ἐνὸς κελεύσματος).⁴

You as a translator can decide how best to render this word. Here are some ways that published translations handle this word.

- *loud command* (NIV, NLT)
- *shout of command* (NET)
- *cry of command* (ESV)

ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου with the voice of an archangel. The word ἀρχάγγελος is used only twice in the whole Bible. Once here and once in Jude 1:9.

However, we can get a feel for the meaning of the word from the components that make it up. ἄγγελος of course means *angel*. The prefix ἀρχι— means *chief* or

¹ When used with the definite article (ὁ αὐτός, ἡ αὐτή, τό αὐτό), it typically means *the same*.

² Greek textbooks will say that in this verse, ἐν carries an *instrumental sense*.

³ Herodotus, op. cit., 1.141 and 7.16.

⁴ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War, Volume I: Books 1-2*, translated by C. F. Smith, Loeb Classical Library 108 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 2.92

principle leader. In Scripture we find ἄρχιερεύς as the *chief priest* or *high priest*. ἄρχισυνάγωγος means *ruler of the synagogue*.

So we definitely get the impression that an ἀρχάγγελος is at the top of whatever hierarchy there might be among angels.

καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ *and with the trumpet of God*. In pre-modern times, military commanders passed battlefield commands to their troops by the use of drums or trumpets. The σάλπιγξ *salpinx* was a trumpet used both in battle and also to signal events at the ancient Olympic Games. It is referred to

Here is a picture of the only salpinx to survive from the ancient Greek era to the present.



Screen Capture from YouTube Video

<https://youtu.be/LfWi2Xh66UI>

It has a chain to help the player hold it up off the ground, and to keep the salpinx from falling apart, as it was constructed of shorter lengths of bone and bronze that were assembled together.



<http://www.bfbresources.com/trumpet-treasure-hunt/the-boston-salpinx-project/>

καταβήσεται ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ *will come down from heaven*. Notwithstanding that by the first century, aorist subjunctives were often used to talk about action that would occur in future time, **καταβήσεται** is a 3rd person future middle indicative singular from **καταβαίνω** *to come down*.

ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ = **ἀπὸ οὐρανοῦ**, but with the final **—ο** of **ἀπὸ** dropped because the next word begins with a vowel. Greeks in ancient times thought that **ἀπὸ οὐρανοῦ** sounded clunky, and was a little difficult to pronounce smoothly, while **ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ** *just felt right*.

ἀπό is always followed by a genitive, and so **ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ** is how you express *from heaven*.

καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον *and the dead in Christ will rise first*. **καὶ** and leads us into a new clause, complete with its own nominative case subject **οἱ νεκροὶ** and a main verb **ἀναστήσονται**.

ἐν Χριστῷ is a prepositional phrase modifying **οἱ νεκροὶ**, specifying which dead are meant—those who died while in relationship with Christ. **οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ** could also be rendered as *those who have died believing in Christ*, or *those who had faith in Christ before dying*.

ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον *will rise first*. Not only are those who have died as believers not forgotten by Jesus, but they will get Jesus' attention at his return even before those who are still alive at that time.

Jesus' Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew by Paul in This Verse
Mt 24:30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.	ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ
Mt 24:31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call....	ἀρχάγγελος
Mt 24:31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call μετὰ σάλπιγγος μεγάλης	ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ

4:17

Then we who remain alive will be carried off with them in the clouds to a meeting with the Lord in the air. And starting in just this way, we will be with the Lord forever.

ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι *Then we who are alive, who are left*. We have two participles here which demonstrate some of their versatility in the NT. Here they are being used as adjectives. Both are nominative case, which tells you they agree with and are connected with the grammatical subject of the sentence, ἡμεῖς *we*—the nominative plural of ἐγώ.

A wooden translation of this phrase might be *Then we, the ones who are alive, the ones who remain*. NET puts this into fluent English as *Then we who are alive, who are left*. PB goes further and translates it as *Then we who remain alive*.

περιλειπόμενοι is a passive participle, but there is not much to be made of it being in the passive voice. BDAG and LSJ agree that this word never occurs in

the active voice in Ancient Greek. BDAG says it invariably takes a passive form of word ending¹ and means *to remain*, or *to be left behind*.

ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα *we will be carried off together (ἅμα) with them.* ἀρπαγησόμεθα is in the future passive indicative, indicating an action that will be done to the subjects. That is, ἡμεῖς is the grammatical subject of the sentence, but the one initiating the action is Jesus and ἡμεῖς is being acted upon.

σὺν αὐτοῖς/σὺν κυρίῳ *with them/with the Lord*. σὺν is—as you can observe in the two examples from this verse—always followed by a dative case noun or pronoun.

The verb carries the sense of being suddenly seized or snatched away. When the Greek New Testament was translated into Latin (the Vulgate), the verb ἀρπαγησόμεθα was rendered as *rapiemur*. This Latin word comes from the verb *rapio*, which also means *to seize* or *to snatch away*.² The English word *rapture* is derived from the Latin *rapio*.

While *rapture* is not used in English Bible translations for this verse, it became associated with the event described in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 due to its etymological connection to the Latin translation.

ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἄέρα *in the clouds to a meeting with the Lord in the air*. We have three prepositional phrases in quick succession. ἐν followed, as it always is, by a dative. Then εἰς twice, each time followed—as it always is—by an accusative.

One may wonder why τοῦ κυρίου is genitive. It seems that if one talks about a meeting, particularly a meeting of Believers with Jesus at his return,³ the name of the person who is being met will be written as a genitive case.

¹ LSJ says that it could either be middle voice or passive voice...but since both of those forms look identical, the LSJ and the BDAG are telling us much the same thing.

² Eugene A. Nida and Johannes P. Louw, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 15.178.

³ Luke used this word in Acts 28:15, where people came out to meet Paul and Luke as they were approaching Rome. He said they came out εἰς ἀπάντησιν ἡμῖν *to meet us*. Surprisingly, Luke indicates who was being met with a *dative* pronoun.

Paul, however, when writing of the return of Jesus, adheres to Matthew's usage and has a *genitive* following εἰς ἀπάντησιν.

καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα *And thus/in this way, we will be with the Lord always/forever.*

It is an interesting linguistic fact of life that the verb *to be* is irregular in many languages. This is true in English.¹ It certainly was in Koine Greek as well.² You would never guess that ἐσόμεθα was the 1st person future middle indicative plural of εἰμί. Helping us to sort this out, however, is why God made the Internet.

Jesus' Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew in This Verse
Mt 24:30 They will see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds in the sky with power and great glory.	ἐν νεφέλαις
Mt 25:6 But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him. ' (εἰς ἀπάντησιν αὐτοῦ)	εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου

4:18

So then, encourage each other with these words.

ὥστε *So then/Therefore.* The conjunction ὥστε typically introduces a clause that indicates the consequence of what preceded it. Here it connects this verse to Paul's previous discussion about the resurrection and Christ's return, showing that these truths are not just encouraging for the individual, but they are things that Believers can repeat to each other for mutual encouragement.

This is enormously encouraging, and stuff we need to hear and keep in mind, as we consider our departed loved ones.

¹ am, is, are, was, were, and been.

² As well as Japanese, Spanish, and many other languages. The be-verb is one of the most commonly used verbs in many

languages. High-frequency words tend to resist regularization and retain irregular forms over time.

This may also encourage us as we ponder our own situations—and not least if we are suffering from a chronic illness.

παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους *encourage each other*. Using an imperative verb form was how Paul communicated that he was giving a command. This is the first imperative verb we have encountered in 1 Thessalonians, but there will be 19 more once we get started in chapter 5.

ἀλλήλους *each other* is in the accusative case, signalling that it is the direct object of the verb **παρακαλεῖτε**.

ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις *with these words*. This is not the first time we will have rendered ἐν by the English word *with*. As always, ἐν is followed by a dative noun, with an article: **τοῖς λόγοις**.

We have seen that there are different ways in Koine Greek of attaching an adjective to a noun. Recently we had a couple of instances of article + noun + article + adjective.

In this verse, we see another pattern: article + noun + adjective. **τούτοις** is acting as an adjective, giving more information about *the words* Paul is talking about. *Which words? These* **τούτοις** words, the ones I have just written about the resurrection and Christ's return.

The command for mutual encouragement remains relevant in our individualistic culture where genuine community can be scarce. We were all compelled to worship by Zoom during the Covid lockdown. Some have continued to worship primarily by Zoom, not attending a local church, but rather tuning in every Sunday morning to a preacher they like who lives in Colorado or some such place. While Paul doesn't speak directly to this, of course—no Zoom in A.D. 50—the flavor of what he has written here suggests that he would disapprove of remote worship with no investment in a local Christian community.

Particularly those who are disconnected from any local Christian community are very susceptible to being sucked into the lunatic fringe of Christianity, often around issues related to the return of Christ. While I could give current illustrations of this from people I know, it is relationally safer for me to look back further in time.

Back in the 1980s, there were several books on the shelf of every bookstore talking about how Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq, was the Anti-Christ. Of course, those books all had to be revised after a western alliance kicked Saddam's butt in 1991. And then the books had to be withdrawn completely in 2006 when Saddam was hanged after a trial by an Iraqi court for crimes against humanity.

Just as the Thessalonians needed clarity about the return of Christ, modern believers often need encouragement to focus on core doctrinal truths. It is important to hear what Paul *is* saying about the return of Jesus, and equally important to hear what he is *not* saying about eschatology.

Chapter 5

5:1

Now as far as the how and when of all this is concerned, brothers and sisters, you do not need for anything to be written to you.

Περὶ δὲ τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν, ἀδελφοί *Now concerning the times and the times, brothers and sisters.* δὲ is in its accustomed place, as the second word in the sentence. It is not being used here as a strong conjunction such as *but*. Rather, it is marking a new paragraph, a new thought.

As a translator you may decide to treat the δὲ as untranslatable, or you may do as the PB did, to use an equally meaningless word in English that is used to carry on a talk, such as *Now*.

περὶ, when followed by a genitive noun, is usually translated as *concerning*, *about*, or *with regard to*.

Both χρόνος and καιρός mean *time*. It is possible that in the Classical Greek era there was some distinction in their meanings, but by the first century, it would seem that τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν had become an expression, with no distinction between the words.¹

We English speakers like these sorts of expressions as well, where we use redundant words with no distinction in meaning, like:

- Aid and abet
- Cease and desist
- Each and every
- Null and void.

¹ See commentary on Acts 1:7 in K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury, *The Acts of the Apostles*, *The*

Beginnings of Christianity vol. IV (London: Macmillan, 1933), 8.

As a translator, you get to make a choice. You may choose to render this expression with two words, as in:

- concerning timelines and dates
- concerning times and dates (NIV)
- concerning how and when all this will happen (NLT and PB)

...or you might choose to render it as a single expression, as in *concerning just when* or *concerning the actual timing*.

With ἀδελφοί, we have yet another instance of the masculine generic, as there is no indication in the context that Paul wants to reassure only the men. Hence, it is best to render ἀδελφοί as *brothers and sisters*.

οὐ χρειάν ἔχετε *you have no need*. The subject of this clause, *you*, is not included as a separate word, but is wired into the verb itself.

γράφεσθαι *to be written* is a passive infinitive. An active infinitive would be rendered as *to write*. The passive infinitive is *to be written*.

With an active voice verb, the grammatical subject (in this sentence, the *you* of the 2nd person plural verb ἔχετε) is the do-er of the action. In this verse, however, we have a passive verb. The grammatical subject of the sentence, *you*, would not be the one doing the writing. Paul would be doing the writing. The Thessalonians would be the ones receiving the writing. Hence the passive verb.

ὑμῖν *to you* is in the dative case, and is the indirect object of the infinitive, indicating those to whom the writing would be addressed.

The Thessalonian situation is the opposite of ours. We are quite clear that those Christians who have died are going to be OK at the return of Jesus. If we have any confusion at all, it is more likely to be around the whole question of just *when* the return of Jesus will occur.

It is interesting that in the space of the mere handful of weeks that Paul was present in Thessalonica, he found the opportunity to speak about the return of Jesus, and how it was that we would not know in advance just when this would happen.

For Paul, the death, resurrection and return of Jesus were all part of his core message. In the church that I attend now, the death and resurrection of Jesus are certainly core. But the return of Jesus is not a topic that comes up very often.

We perceive ourselves as being a church whose practice is shaped by the New Testament. But the failed prophecies that were published so widely in the 1970s and 1980s¹ perhaps discredited the whole area of prophecy² and *the end times*, and we have responded by not talking much about the return of Jesus.

We have let the pendulum swing too far, and it is time to think about what—for Paul—constituted essential teaching for young believers.

Jesus' Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew in This Verse
Matt. 24:36 Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης καὶ ὥρας— <i>But concerning that day and hour no one knows....</i>	Περὶ δὲ τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν

5:2

For you yourselves already know, correctly, that the Day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief in the night.

αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἀκριβῶς οἶδατε *For you yourselves correctly know.* γὰρ is in its expected place, as the second word in the sentence. αὐτοὶ is here functioning as an intensifier. So it is not just *you know οἶδατε* but *you yourselves know αὐτοὶ οἶδατε*.

¹ The edition of *The Late Great Planet Earth* that I purchased in 1973 was pretty specific about prophecy. It predicted the certain return of Jesus no later than 1981, and even had maps with arrows indicating where the Russian amphibious units would land in Israel.

When 1981 came and went uneventfully—no return of Jesus; no Russian invasion of Israel—the author revised the book to try and keep his sales figures up (you cannot purchase a 1973

edition of this book today), but a lot of people decided that there were better things to think about than the return of Jesus.

² Of course, there are Pentecostals who are quite serious about the Bible—not at all part of the lunatic fringe—who have kept alive the idea that God may still give prophetic messages to his people.

This emphasis indicates that the Thessalonians already possess this knowledge, surely based on Paul's earlier teaching during his time with them.

The adverb ἀκριβῶς *precisely, accurately* modifies οἶδατε. That is, what they know about the timing of the Lord's return they know correctly and accurately.

ὅτι *that* presents the content of what they know.

ἡμέρα κυρίου *the Day of the Lord*. Although in Greek ἡμέρα κυρίου appears without an article, in English the is required. *The Day of the Lord* is a specific event, not one event of many. *The Day of the Lord* (יִּוֵם יְהוָה) is an OT concept: it was the day when Yahweh would vindicate his righteous cause and execute impartial judgment,¹ as indicated in these passages (NIV).

- Amos 5:18-20—Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord!...
- Joel 2:31—The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.
- Zephaniah 1:14-16—The great day of the Lord is near—near and coming quickly.
- Malachai 4:5—See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.

Judgement for God's enemies, but vindication and deliverance for God's people.

- Joel 2:32— And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance.
- Zech 14:1-21— Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him....On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem.

This letter is one of the first that Paul wrote.² He would refer to this event repeatedly in later letters, using similar wording.

Since Jesus was viewed as κύριος *Lord*, he was viewed as the Lord whose day it was; hence, in addition to being called *the Day of the Lord* (cf. 2 Thess 2:2; 1 Cor 5:5; 2 Pet 3:10), it is called *the day of Christ* (Phil 1:10; 2:16), *the day of Jesus Christ* (Phil 1:6), *the day of our Lord Jesus* (2 Cor 1:14), *the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Cor 1:8).... It is sometimes referred to simply as *the day* (v 4; Rom

¹ Bruce, *Thessalonians*, op. cit., 109.

² Only Galatians was written earlier.

13:12; 1 Cor 3:13; Heb 10:25) or *that day* (2 Thess 1:10). It is, in other words, the day of Christ's revelation in glory, when he comes to vindicate his people and judge the world in righteousness (cf. Acts 17:31).¹

Of course, the Jewish component to the congregation in Thessalonica had probably spent their whole lives giving thought to *the Day of the Lord*, just as had Palestinian Jews. So Paul associating the Day of the Lord with Jesus was perhaps not a huge innovation in thought, but more just a refocusing of their thinking. In this, it would be similar to the Emmaus Road conversation which helped the two disciples refine their thinking about OT prophecy generally, and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah in particular.

ὥς κλέπτης ἐν νυκτὶ οὕτως ἔρχεται *just as a thief in the night comes*. The combination of both ὥς and οὕτως creates what appears to be a redundancy in English translation, since either one alone could convey the comparative idea (i.e. that the coming of the day of the Lord is *similar* to the unexpectedness of the coming of a thief).

However, in Greek this construction (ὥς...οὕτως) is a one that Paul uses in several places.² The two words work together to form a more emphatic or precise comparison. It's similar to English pairs like *just as...so also* or *as...so*. The ὥς introduces the comparison, and οὕτως serves to complete or close it.

ἐν νυκτὶ sees ἐν rendered with its most common translation, *in*. We expect to see it followed by a dative, and so it is with νυκτὶ. Once again, we see a difference in the use of the English article and the Greek article. ἐν νυκτὶ fairly cries out to be rendered as *in the night*, even though in Greek there is no article.

We are stuck with the grammatical terms that have evolved for Greek over the past 500 years. If we were inventing terms from scratch today, we would probably not use the word *article* for ὁ, since its function diverges from that of the English article so often. And we would probably find a word other than *tense* to describe that characteristic of the Greek verb. In English, *tense* is *all about* time. Did some action happen in the past, or is it happening right now? But in Greek, what we call tense is sometimes about time, and sometimes about how

¹ Ibid.

² Rom. 5:15, 1 Cor. 7:17, 2 Cor. 1:7, Gal. 4:29
In Gal. 4:29, Paul uses ὥσπερ

instead of ὥς, but with the same pairing and function with οὕτως.

the writer was thinking about the action—how he was conceptualizing it, whether in the past, present, or future.

A good example of this is the last word of this verse, **ἔρχεται**. It is in the grammatical present tense—but the whole point of Paul's writing here is that it hasn't happened yet, and it is yet to come. So we must, if the verse is to make sense in English, translate this with a future tense *will come*.

If Paul were writing this today, in Canada, with our high levels of personal safety—by historical standards; we have no need to live in a walled city; most of us do not experience frequent burglaries—he might not write about a thief in the night but the suddenness and unexpectedness of a computer crash.

Rather than encouraging us, as he does in verse 6, to *stay awake*, he might talk about the need to be daily backed up, because you never know when your computer will lock up, you reboot, and are faced with the terrifying message, *Drive C: does not exist*. In a heartbeat, all the important—irreplaceable!—files you have that are not backed up will come to mind. But it is too late...too late.

Perhaps I should entitle this commentary: *Eschatological Reflections by a Retired Programmer and Network-Support Guy*.

Jesus' Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew in This Verse
Matt. 24:36 Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης καὶ ὥρας — <i>But concerning that day and hour no one knows....</i>	Περὶ δὲ τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν

5:3

When people say, "Peace! Security!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly, like the pain of childbirth comes upon a pregnant woman—and they will have absolutely no escape.

ὅταν λέγωσιν *When they say*. The English word *they* is built into the nature of the 3rd person plural verb. There is no need to indicate any more specific noun as the subject of the verb. However, for the sake of good English style, and since there has been no discussion yet of a group to whom *they* may apply, the PB inserts the noun *people* as the subject of the verb.

In the NT, ὅταν is typically followed by either a present or aorist subjunctive verb. The subjunctive mood indicates that people saying this is not, or not yet, a fact or reality as far as Paul is concerned in A.D. 50. It is something that will happen in future time. The indicative mood is used to talk about things that are factually true, actions that have happened in the past or are happening now.

The distinction between the aorist and present subjunctives following ὅταν is rather subtle, as they seem to get rendered into English in about the same way. A project you could take on is to look at each of the 123 instances of ὅταν in the NT, and see if you can find a pattern in why writers used one tense rather than the other.

Εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια *peace and security* appears as a slogan-like phrase. This may have been a common saying, possibly echoing Roman propaganda about the benefits of empire—the Pax Romana.

The word translated *when* usually, but not always, means *whenever*; but *whenever* clearly will not do here, since the Day of the Lord does not come every time people talk of peace and security (virtually two synonyms)....*Just when people are saying how peaceful and secure everything is....*¹

τότε αἰφνίδιος αὐτοῖς ἐφίσταται ὄλεθρος *then sudden destruction will come to them*. Even though there are two words between the adjective αἰφνίδιος and the noun it modifies ὄλεθρος, the fact that both are nominative singular masculine makes it clear that they are connected, with αἰφνίδιος modifying ὄλεθρος. Not just *destruction*, but *sudden destruction*.

Even though ἐφίσταται is a present tense verb, the context makes it clear that this sudden destruction, which comes with the Day of the Lord, has not yet arrived.

This verse is a good illustration of the way that Greek tense differs from English tense. In English, tense is all about time. In Greek, the present tense *may* be (and most often is) about action in present time, but may describe action in any time. There will be other indicators in the context that will clarify whether the action of the verb is past, present or future.

¹ Nida and Ellingworth, op. cit., 106.

Examples of the Greek Present Indicative

- Matt. 8:25—Lord, we are perishing. (time = **present**)
- Mark 11:27— They came again to Jerusalem (time = **past**)
- Matt. 26:18— I will come to your house to eat the Passover meal with my protégés. (time = **future**)
- 2 Cor. 9:7—God loves a joyful giver (time = **omni-temporal**; always true: past, present and future)

As we try to sort out why biblical authors used various tenses, it seems that when they used the aorist, they were thinking of the action of the verb as a *complete whole*. When they used the present tense, they were thinking of the action of the verb more as an *event-in-process*.¹

So it may be that Paul used the present tense verb in 1 Thess. 5:3 because in his mind, as he was composing this letter, he visualized the destruction of the Day of the Lord as *starting* suddenly, but *being an unfolding tragedy* for those who had never been followers of Jesus.

ὥσπερ ἡ ὥδιν τῇ ἐν γαστρὶ ἐχούσῃ *just as labor pains come to a woman who is pregnant*. To make good sense in proper English, I assumed there was an implied verb in this phrase, *come*.

τῇ ἐν γαστρὶ ἐχούσῃ functions as an idiomatic expression for *a pregnant woman* in Ancient Greek. This phrase literally translates to *the one having in the womb*, which is a common way to refer to pregnancy in Greek texts.

τῇ ἐχούσῃ is in the dative case because it is the indirect object of the implied verb. We most often introduce an indirect object in English by using the word *to*.

The construction consists of:

- τῇ: The feminine singular dative article

¹ This way of thinking about verbs, as being about the way the author *visualized* the action, is called *verbal aspect*.
If you read about aspect and tense in Koine Greek, it becomes very complicated, very quickly. The distinctions in aspect are nowhere as clearcut as

distinctions in time (where something is either past, present or future). So authors who try to nail down the distinctions in aspect are trying, in the words of Ecclesiastes, to chase the wind.

- ἐν γαστρὶ: A prepositional phrase meaning *in the womb*
- ἔχουσα: A feminine singular dative present active participle of ἔχω *to have*

This type of participial construction is frequently used in Greek to create noun-like phrases. In this case, it forms a noun phrase, effectively meaning *the pregnant woman*.

καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐκφύγωσιν *and there will definitely be no escape*. Just as in 4:15—where there is a discussion of how this aorist tense came to apply to future time—we have a doubled negative followed by an aorist plural subjunctive verb, to express that the action will be in the future time, with the οὐ μὴ expressing the strongest form of negation in Greek. *They will absolutely not escape*.

There will come a time when you will experience the full consequences of your decisions in life. And if you have chosen to reject Jesus, *destruction* is not too strong a word for what is going to happen to you.

Jesus' Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew in This Verse
Mt 24:39—and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.	αἰφνίδιος...ἄλεθρος
Mt 24:8—All these are but the beginning of the birth pains (ὥδιν)	ὥδιν

5:4

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark, such that that day can come on you as a thief.

ὁμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί *But you, brothers and sisters*. ὁμεῖς is in the nominative case, since he is talking about the Believers in Thessalonica, while ἀδελφοί *brothers and sisters* is tagged as being in the vocative case, since he is addressing them directly.

In this case, there seems to be only a subtle distinction in the functions of the nominative and the vocative. But we have seen 11 instances in 1 Thessalonians so far where the vocative has been used. In no instance was a vocative noun ever used as the grammatical subject of a sentence. In fact, the editor of the SBLGNT typically sets off the vocative case addressing-by-name with commas ὑμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ.... The sentence could function equally well without the vocative case address in between those commas.

οὐκ ἔστε ἐν σκότει you are not in darkness. The notion of you are is inherent in the 2nd person plural form of ἔστε. This means that Paul was including an explicit ὑμεῖς at the beginning of the sentence to add emphasis. *But you, on the other hand, are not in the dark.*

δέ is not as forceful in setting up a contrast as ἀλλά is. So then, you as a translator need to make a judgement call on how forceful to be in your English rendering. You might choose a simple *But you*, or you might go with a more forceful *you, on the other hand*. One way or another, there is a distinction between the Believers and those who live their lives in spiritual darkness.

ἐν in is a preposition that is invariably followed by a dative noun or pronoun. So we are not surprised to learn that σκότει is a dative singular neuter, even though the —ει ending makes it a bit difficult to recognize as a dative singular.

ἵνα ἡ ἡμέρα ὑμᾶς ὡς κλέπτης καταλάβῃ *such that the Day might come upon you like a thief*. καταλάβῃ is in the subjunctive mood, and describes something that is not reality. This is appropriate, since the Thessalonians are living in the light. It is only a hypothetical as to what would happen to them if they were not in the light. Hence, the subjunctive.

ἡ ἡμέρα is in the nominative case, and so is the grammatical subject of the verb. *That Day might come upon*. ὑμᾶς is in the accusative case, and so is the direct object of the verb. *Might come upon you*.

ὡς is of course introducing a comparison. It is interesting that κλέπτης is in the nominative case. But it is a pattern in Koine Greek that if you have a comparison between two things, the two *things* will agree with each other in case.

We see this in Matthew 10:16— γίνεσθε οὖν φρόνιμοι ὡς οἱ ὄφεις καὶ ἀκέραιοι ὡς αἱ περιστέραί *Therefore be as wise as serpents yet as innocent as doves*. Here we see ὄφεις *serpents* and περιστέραί *doves* in nominative case, agreeing with the implied subject of γίνεσθε (i.e. *You*).

Another example is in 1 Peter 5:8—ὁ ἀντίδικος ὑμῶν διάβολος ¹ὥς λέων ὠρυόμενος περιπατεῖ *Your enemy, the Devil, is walking up and down like a roaring lion.*

λέων is nominative, agreeing with the subject ὁ ἀντίδικος *The enemy* (of you ὑμῶν, i.e., *Your enemy*).

Just as your data backups need to be constantly, and totally up to date, so also your life needs to be constantly and totally invested in Jesus and in obedience to him.

You know that Jesus will surely return (as surely as you know that a day will come when your computer hardware malfunctions). So you are always living in a state of expectation and preparedness.

Jesus' Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew in This Verse
Matt 24:43—But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief ὁ κλέπτης would come...	ὥς κλέπτης
And of course, the two passages are very similar <i>thematically</i> . Both passages emphasize the sudden and unexpected nature of the Day of the Lord. Matt 24:36-44 makes this explicit: <i>But of that day and hour no one knows...</i>	
And both highlight the distinction between the prepared and the unprepared. This verse (plus verse 5 to follow) contrasts those in darkness with those in light. Matt 25:1-13 contrasts wise and foolish virgins.	

¹ There is yet another nominative in this phrase: διάβολος. It is a noun that gives more information about the grammatical

subject ὁ ἀντίδικος, and so agrees in case with that subject.

5:5

For you are all children of the light—children of the day. We are not children of the night or darkness.

πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς υἱοὶ φωτός ἐστε καὶ υἱοὶ ἡμέρας *For you are all children of light and children of day.* The conjunction γὰρ, coming in its standard place as the second word of the clause, connects this verse logically to the preceding context, providing an explanation for *why* the Day of the Lord will *not* surprise believers as a thief.

ὑμεῖς is the subject of the verb. πάντες is an adjective which agrees in number, gender, and case with ὑμεῖς, which clarifies for us that Paul intended πάντες to modify ὑμεῖς rather than some other word in the sentence.

We see equative nominatives in this verse.¹ That is we have a nominative noun or pronoun (in this case, the pronoun ὑμεῖς) plus a be-verb ἐστε followed by a nominative noun or pronoun (in this case, by two nouns, both nominative).

So we have ὑμεῖς ≈ υἱοὶ (φωτός) + υἱοὶ (ἡμέρας).

φωτός and ἡμέρας are both in the genitive case, and perform a very ordinary function of the genitive—to express what we do in English with *of* or *from*. In this case, *of* fits the context best. Children *of* light. Children *of* day.

Paul's education was heavily influenced by the Old Testament, and there are hints of that in this verse. In the Hebrew, the *son of* X means one characterized by or belonging to X. So here Paul is saying that Believers fundamentally belong to and share the characteristics of light and day—common biblical motifs.

Children of the light was an expression used by Jesus in Luke 16:8. It is also a term that we find in the Dead Sea Scrolls, left to us by the Qumran community, to describe those who are on God's side: בְּנֵי אֹר.

It is possible that in speaking of God's people as *children of the day*, Paul may have been alluding to the Day of the Lord. Certainly that is what this whole context is about. If that is the case, Paul could have implying that we are already

¹ In Greek textbooks, this may be called a *predicate nominative* construction.

experiencing something of what the New Heaven and New Earth are all about, even now before the return of Jesus.

In the last quarter of my career, I worked as a computer programmer for a hospital group where my *customers* were internal—members of the Medical Affairs department, which managed the 5,000 physicians in this group.

Not all of the members of that department of 18 or so people were Christians, but several were. Their influence as salt and light was such that working for Medical Affairs was a little bit like working in heaven. People were genuinely kind and patient with each other. To some extent, working in Medical Affairs was a little bit like working in the Kingdom of God.

And of course, being in a good church, with an absence of gossip and a good bit of mutual support, is like experiencing the downpayment of life in the Kingdom.

οὐκ ἐσμὲν νυκτὸς οὐδὲ σκότους *We are not (children) of the night nor of darkness.* νυκτὸς and σκότους are both genitive, and probably understand that υἱοί is assumed.

Another mark of the extent to which the Old Testament influenced his thinking is his use of a chiasm in this verse. A chiasm is a pattern in a composition which uses a nested symmetric or mirror-like structure.

Children of	[Light
		Day
		Night
		Darkness

While only mildly interesting in 1 Thess. 5:5, it can be very helpful to recognize chiasm in parts of the Old Testament.

Most chiastic structures are longer than one line, sometimes stretching across entire chapters, with a hinge point in the middle. Westerners are accustomed to a conclusion landing at the end, like the moral of the story or the punchline of a joke, but the ancient Near Eastern mind liked to embed the main idea dead center.

If we don't recognize this structure as we read Scripture, from the Psalms to the words of Jesus, we risk placing the emphasis on the wrong point.¹

For instance, a chiastic structure lies behind some difficult passages in the book of Job. What we expect in Job 19:21-29 is to see Job start out with his troubles, and then build to a climax that is positive.

You ought not attack me and say that my troubles are my own fault.
But in spite of all, I know that my redeemer lives!
I know that I will see God face to face!

...followed by the closing prayer and an invitation to have sandwiches and cookies after the service.

What we get instead in Job is this chiastic structure.

You ought not attack me and say that my troubles are my own fault.
But I know that my redeemer lives.
I will see God face to face.

You ought not attack me and say that my troubles are my own fault.

There is no reason that building-to-a-climax is any better as a rhetorical device than mirroring-words/concepts-in-a-chiasm. It is merely different. Being aware of the possibility of encountering a chiasm can make us better Bible readers.

5:6

So then, let us not sleep like all the others, but let us stay awake and be clear headed.

ἄρα οὖν *Therefore*. Combining ἄρα and οὖν is a common way that Paul uses to draw conclusions from a previous discussion.²

μὴ καθεύδωμεν *let us not sleep*. I have spoken before that the subjunctive is often used to talk about action that is unreal, or potential. That usage broadened by NT times to make a subjunctive (particularly an aorist subjunctive) equivalent

¹ Jen Wilkin, *At My Mother's Deathbed, I Discovered the Symmetry of a Long Life*, Christianity Today, January/February, 2025.

² 11 times in his letters, 7 of which are in Romans.

to a future tense. But there is another standard use of the subjunctive—to deliver an exhortation, particularly in the first person plural (the *let us...* form).

In this verse we see both a negative exhortation—let us not sleep—and a pair of positive ones—let us stay awake and be clear headed—all expressed with present active subjunctives.¹

ὥς οἱ λοιποί *like the rest*. **λοιποί** is an adjective, but as we have seen before, the Greek article **ὁ/οἱ**/etc. can turn almost any kind of word—an adverb, adjective, infinitive, participle—into a noun. Here, the plural adjective remaining, as in *the remaining (whatevers)*, becomes a noun referring to the other people in Thessalonica, the rest, the ones who are not Jesus-followers.

ἀλλὰ γρηγορῶμεν καὶ νήφωμεν *but let us stay awake and be clear headed*. As indicated above, Paul uses two subjunctive verbs to express an exhortation.

The metaphorical *sleep* Paul warns against may find modern expression in Netflix binges, social media absorption, and consumer culture that can blunt our focus on following Jesus. The problem is that we can lose our edge without realizing it.

Probably, the best defense we have is in following basic spiritual disciplines, such as:

- Bible study—both individual and in a group
- Meditation
- Prayer
- Corporate Worship

One spiritual discipline that many believers have found helpful over a period of many centuries is that of *solitude*. It may be particularly relevant today—not so much in that we head off into the Rocky Mountains to spend a week in a tent in the woods, on our own. Rather, solitude in the sense of a *digital fast* for a time, even while still in the city, is a practice that may be useful for us.

¹ ...which we recognize by the *—ωμεν* ending.

I have several times found that a digital fast has been helpful. I set up an auto-reply in my email that said:

Thank you for your email, but I will not be reading it. I am taking some time off from my computer and cellphone—a digital detox. I will be investing more of my time in face-to-face relationships with family and friends, and in reading books.

I will be going back online on <date> and will appreciate hearing from you again at that time.

The most realistic time for me to do this sort of thing was when I was going on vacation anyway. The nature of my work made a digital detox impossible except when on holidays.

I have a friend who has had a one month fasting from the news. He found that following the news as closely as he did was having a negative effect on his emotions and attitudes. Taking a month off from reading news on his phone or watching it on TV was quite helpful for him.

Jesus' Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew in This Verse
<p>Mt 24:42—Therefore, stay awake (γρηγορέω)</p> <p>Mt 25:13—Therefore, stay prepared! (γρηγορέω)¹ For you do not know the day or the hour when I will return.</p>	<p>γρηγορέω</p>

¹ The word in Matthew 25 is the same one used in 1 Thessalonians. But I went with *prepared* rather than *awake* in my translation of Matthew, since in the context of the story, there was no problem with any of the young women falling asleep. They all did that.

The problem that half of them had was in not being prepared...in not taking appropriate action to ensure they were ready for the master of the household to return at any moment.

5:7

For those who sleep, sleep at night and those who get drunk are drunk at night.

οἱ γὰρ καθεύδοντες νυκτὸς καθεύδουσιν *For those who are asleep sleep at night.* The word καθεύδω to sleep gets used in this phrase twice. First, with an article in the nominative plural to form a verbal noun (*those who* or *the ones who*) that is the grammatical subject of the sentence *those who sleep*. Second, it is used as the main verb.

In 2:9 and 3:10 we have run into the genitive of time, to describe the time within which the action of the verb takes place. So in this case, the best way to render the genitive νυκτὸς is *at night*.

καὶ οἱ μεθυσκόμενοι νυκτὸς μεθύουσιν *and those who get drunk are drunk at night.* Paul has created a parallel here, using a single verb twice in a phrase, and then having two such phrases.

In Greek there is no difference in word-formation between middle and passive voice for μεθύσκομαι. This is a good example of what's called the "middle-passive" form where the same morphology (word-formation) can be interpreted as either middle or passive voice depending on context. It's technically ambiguous whether Paul means *those who get themselves drunk* (middle voice, emphasizing the subject's participation in the action) or *those who are being made drunk* (passive voice, emphasizing the effect of the alcohol on them). The editor at STEP Bible tags μεθυσκόμενοι as passive voice.

In this context, given that it's paired with the active μεθύουσιν (*they are drunk*), I think the middle voice interpretation might make more sense—describing people actively participating in getting themselves drunk, leading to the state of drunkenness. This would align better with Paul's overall point about moral responsibility and choosing behaviors associated with darkness.

All this said, your translation will be much the same whether you understand this participle as being middle or passive voice.

Jesus' Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew in This Verse
Mt 24:48f.—But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My	μεθύσκομαι

master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards (τῶν μεθύόντων).....	
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5:8

But since we are of the day, let us be vigilant and wear a breastplate of faith and love, and a helmet, the confidence in our salvation.

ἡμεῖς δὲ ἡμέρας ὄντες νήφωμεν *But let us who are of the day be vigilant.* The conjunction δὲ, which regularly appears as the second word of whatever phrase it is in, never the first, sets up a contrast with *those who are drunk at night* from the previous verse.

A wooden translation would be *But we, being of the day, let us be vigilant.* That phrase needs reworking, however, before it reads smoothly in English.

It is a general principle of translation that you want people to respond to your rendering as the original readers/hearers (for those who read aloud to the church in Thessalonica) responded to Paul's original text. You have missed the mark if people read your translation and instead of thinking about Paul's content they think, *Wow. This is clunky English. I can barely understand what the author is getting at.*

Now, if you think the original author *intended* his style to be awkward, and that the original recipients, all fluent in Greek, had a tough time sorting out what was written, then it is OK for your translation to reflect that awkwardness.

But that is not the case in this letter. It was written to be easily understood, and it was! Your translation must be easily understood as well.

As in 5:6, we have a subjunctive verb νήφωμεν which Paul used as an exhortation. *Let us <do such-and-such>.* Content-wise, verse 8a repeats what was said in v. 6. It be the case that verse 7 was a parenthetical remark, and with 5:8 Paul wants to get his readers back on track with his primary train of thought.

In all likelihood, Paul dictated this letter to a scribe. Verses 6 to 8 have the feel of Paul developing a thought, going off on a slight tangent, then coming back to where he left off, to carry on.

For us, of course, tracking with one of the great minds of the last 2,000 years—and what’s more, one who was inspired by the Holy Spirit—even Paul’s tangents are like precious gold.

ἐνδυσάμενοι θώρακα πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης *wearing the breastplate of faith and love*. Participles are verbs that have picked up some of the qualities of a noun, such as case, gender, and number. ἐνδυσάμενοι *putting on/wearing* is a nominative plural masculine, which clearly indicates that Paul was linking this to the nominative plural masculine ἡμεῖς *We* that is the subject of the sentence. So it is the *We* of this verse who are to wear this breastplate.

Θώρακα is accusative, since it is the direct object of the participle ἐνδυσάμενοι, while πίστεως and ἀγάπης are both performing the task that the Greek genitive so often does—namely, to express what we do in English with the word *of*.

Breastplate is a fine translation of Θώρακα, but is not a word commonly used in English. I considered rendering the word as *armor*. On the other hand, if you go to Amazon.com and search for *breastplate armor*, you will see dozens of breastplates for sale. There is a lively enough cosplay subculture that the word may be making its way back into the language.

The factor that tipped me to using *breastplate* instead of *armor* is that later in the verse, the believer is urged to add a helmet. Helmets are considered a *component* of armor. So it felt odd to have Paul saying *Put on armor and a helmet*. I ended up using the word *breastplate*. But it is a judgement call on your part as a translator as to how to render this word into English.

Here, Paul talks of the breastplate of faith and love.¹ In Eph. 6:11-18, he refers to the breastplate of righteousness. There is no official, consistent inventory of the armor of God. Rather, it is Paul playing with an armor metaphor² that he found useful in several contexts.

In Romans 13:12 he encourages believers to ἐνδυσώμεθα τὰ ὅπλα τοῦ φωτός *put on the armor of light*. To be around Paul listen to him speak, whether in Thessalonica, Ephesus, Rome, or wherever, was to hear him talk about putting

¹ Faith and love were connected in Paul’s thinking. In Gal. 5:6 he ties them together again in *faith which works through love*.

² Possibly finding its genesis in Is. 59:17, He wears his desire for justice like body armor, and his desire to deliver is like a helmet on his head. (NET)

on the armor of God. It was one of the things that was characteristic of Paul, rather like his love of attaching hyper— to the front of verbs.¹

καὶ περικεφαλαίαν ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας *and a helmet, the hope of salvation.* περικεφαλαίαν and ἐλπίδα are both accusative, and so are both direct object of the participle *putting on*. The best way I could find to manage dual direct objects was with a comma: *a helmet, the hope...*

Hope is a very common rendering of ἐλπίς in published translations of the NT. However, in English *hope* is a word often applied to something you want to happen, but which may or may not occur. Scripture indicates that our salvation is sure. Jesus will certainly return. Nothing is more certain than that.

In light of this, I thought it better to render ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας as *the confidence in our salvation*. Another option would be *the confident expectation of our salvation*.

This need to be vigilant is present not only in Paul's writings, but in 1 Pet. 5:8— *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

Jesus' Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew in This Verse
Matt. 24:13—But the one who endures to the end will be saved (σῶζω, the verb form of σωτηρία).	σωτηρία

5:9

For God did not put us here to experience his anger, but to experience salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

ὅτι *For* is a conjunction that connects this verse to the previous discussion about being alert and sober, providing a theological rationale/motivation for the exhortations of vv. 6 & 8.

¹ See 3:10 if you have forgotten this discussion.

οὐκ ἔθετο ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς εἰς ὀργὴν *God did not put us (here) to experience his anger.* ἔθετο is a curious word for Paul to use here. The GNT renders the phrase *God did not choose us*. The NIV *God did not appoint us*.

The Greek verb does not imply choosing certain persons from among a larger group, and the reference to the future contained in the English *destined* is found, not in the Greek verb itself, but in the following words, εἰς ὀργὴν.¹

In light of this, I decided to keep close to the ordinary meaning of the verb τίθημι, *to put*. The ὀργή Paul refers to is, based on the context provided by 1:10, the judgement of the end-time, at the Day of the Lord, from which Jesus delivers his people.²

ὁ θεὸς is in the nominative case, which is how Paul tells us it is the subject of the sentence. ἡμᾶς is in the accusative case, which makes it the direct object of the verb ἔθετο.

The εἰς...εἰς construction is common in Pauline literature for presenting contrasting destinations or purposes. See Romans 6:16 for a similar usage.

Do you not know that....you are slaves of the one you obey, *either* of sin resulting in death ἁμαρτίας εἰς θάνατον, *or* obedience resulting in righteousness ὑπακοῆς εἰς δικαιοσύνην? (NET)

ἀλλὰ εἰς περιποίησιν σωτηρίας *but for the obtaining of salvation*. εἰς is always followed by an accusative of some sort, so we are unsurprised that περιποίησιν is—as also is ὀργὴν earlier in the verse—an accusative noun. It means *keeping; an acquiring or obtaining, acquisition*. The genitive is doing its common task of handling what we do in English with *of*, hence *of salvation*.

Given that but for the obtaining of salvation is awkward English, I rendered this *but to experience salvation*.

διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ *through our Lord Jesus Christ*. διὰ can be followed by either a genitive or an accusative. When followed by a genitive, as it is here, it means *through* or *by means of*. The genitive component of the prepositional phrase is τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ Nida and Ellingworth, op. cit., 112.

² Bruce, *Thessalonians*, op. cit., 112.

The genitive ἡμῶν is there for a different reason, to indicate possession. Jesus is not just *the* Lord. He is *our* Lord.

This whole idea of the anger of God against people who have not committed themselves to following Jesus seems odd to us. We are OK with the idea that God might be—and indeed, should be!—angry with the Russians who intentionally target Ukrainian children’s-daycare centers with precision missiles.

But so many of the sins we commit seem to be victimless crimes. We cannot understand why God would *get* angry. However, as we become wiser we come to realize that victimless crimes may not exist. Going to prostitutes feeds into the sex-slavery trade, and gambling destroys families.

The more insight we develop, the more ramifications we see to the choices we make and the behaviors we engage in. And God’s level of insight goes far beyond our own.

In any case, God’s objective for us is salvation, redemption, wholeness, שלום—shalom that touches our inner selves as well as our relationships with others.

Further, a fundamental aspect of the deep structure of the universe is that we should reconciled to God through Jesus, and love the people God has created. It is also fundamental to the universe that if we do not take advantage of this reconciliation, then bad things are going to happen to us. These bad things come to into sharp focus at the Day of the Lord.

Jesus’ Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew in This Verse
<p>There are no specific echoes from Matthew 24-25 in this verse, other than the general sense that God’s anger is a component of the Day of the Lord, and that those who remain loyal to Jesus, who hold out to the end will be saved (Matt. 24:13). This is God’s goal for us.</p> <p>Clearly, Paul’s thinking about God’s purposes and what the future has in store was shaped and informed by what Jesus said about the future.</p>	

5:10

who died for us so that whether we are physically alive or dead, we will actually be alive together with him.

This verse carries on, as part of the same sentence, from verse 9. By writing the article + participle **τοῦ ἀποθανόντος** *the one who died* in the genitive case, Paul was making it clear that he is giving more detail about τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ from the previous verse.

περὶ ἡμῶν *for us*. The translation of *περὶ* varies depending on the case that follows it. Here it is followed by the genitive ἡμῶν, yielding the meaning *for us* or *concerning us*. The context clearly suggests sacrificial death, so *for us* is the better translation.

ἵνα *so that* is a conjunction that introduces a purpose clause, indicating the goal or aim of Christ's death. Of the several uses of subjunctive verbs, one is that Greek writers liked to follow ἵνα with a verb in the subjunctive mood. So it is that ζήσωμεν is in the subjunctive.

The form of this sentence, where a statement about the death or self-giving of Christ is followed by a clause expressing its purpose, is a recurring one in the letters of Paul. *To this end Christ died and lived again, that (ἵνα) he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living (Rom 14:9); he died for all, that (ἵνα) those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised (2 Cor 5:15); God for our sake made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that (ἵνα) in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21).*¹

εἴτε γρηγορῶμεν εἴτε καθεύδωμεν *whether we are awake (or) whether we are asleep*. Paul does not know whether any given individual will be alive or dead at the moment Jesus returns, so he frames this clause hypothetically. And the way to make hypothetical statements in Koine Greek is with the subjunctive mood. Hence, both γρηγορῶμεν and καθεύδωμεν are in the subjunctive mood.

ἅμα σὺν αὐτῷ ζήσωμεν *we might live together with him*. There are several things we can say about the subjunctive verb ζήσωμεν. The subjunctive mood inherently expresses potential, possibility, or intent rather than definite reality

¹ Bruce, *Thessalonians*, op. cit., 113.

(which would use the indicative mood). When used in a ἵνα clause, it indicates purpose or intended result.

In English, we often use "might" or "may" to capture this sense of purpose/intention combined with potential. It's our way of expressing that this is the aimed-for outcome rather than a simple statement of what will happen. We can see this working itself out in these verses where Paul makes a statement about the death or self-giving of Christ, followed by a clause expressing its purpose.¹

- *To this end Christ died and lived again, **that** (ἵνα) **he might be** Lord both of the dead and of the living (Rom 14:9);*
- *he died for all, **that** (ἵνα) **those** who live **might live** no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised (2 Cor 5:15);*
- *God for our sake made him to be sin who knew no sin, **so that** (ἵνα) in him **we might become** the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21).²*

Since we have the same ἵνα followed by a subjunctive verb, we can feel good about rendering this as **we might live together with him**.

However, this consistent translation with *might* is somewhat of an English translation convention rather than a strict necessity. Some modern translations will sometimes render these purpose clauses more directly:

- *so that we become*
- *so that he is Lord*
- *so that we live*

The key point is that the subjunctive in these ἵνα clauses is expressing purpose or intended result, and English translators have traditionally used *might* to capture this nuance. But the *might* translation isn't mandated by the Greek grammar itself - it's just one way English has developed to express the purpose/potential aspect of these clauses.

You as a translator get to make a judgement call as to how to render this subjunctive verb.

¹ This is a recurring theme in the letters of Paul.

² Bruce, *Thessalonians*, op. cit., 113.

σύν, meaning *with* or *together with*, is one of a small group of prepositions in Koine Greek that is invariably followed by a dative case noun or pronoun. Therefore, the dative αὐτῶ in the verse is the expected and required case following σύν.

This is different from many other Greek prepositions (like περί, ἐπί, or κατά) which can take multiple cases with different meanings. The consistency of σύν taking the dative makes it one of the more straightforward prepositions to work with in Greek grammar.

Jesus' Talk on the Mount of Olives in Matthew	Echoes of Matthew in This Verse
Matt. 24:42—So then stay awake! (γρηγορέω) Matt. 25:13—Therefore, stay prepared! (γρηγορέω)	γρηγορώμεν
Thematically, both 1 Thessalonians and Matthew 24-25 deal with preparedness for the Lord's coming, and emphasize that the timing is unknown but the outcome is certain for Believers.	

5:11

So then, encourage each other, and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

διὸ παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους *So then, encourage each other.* The conjunction διὸ *therefore* connects this verse to the preceding discussion about the Day of the Lord and Christian preparedness. It indicates that what follows is a logical conclusion from the previous argument.

παρακαλεῖτε is a 2nd person imperative—a command given to a group. It is interesting that in the Gospel of John, the noun form παράκλητος of this verb is used as a description and name of the Holy Spirit.

We do the same sort of thing in English as the Greeks did, in creating verb/noun pairs that are related to each other. For instance:

- To teach—teacher

- To create—creation
- To appear—appearance

ἀλλήλους is in the accusative case, functioning as the direct object of παρακαλεῖτε.

καὶ οἰκοδομεῖτε εἰς τὸν ἕνα *and build each other up*. οἰκοδομεῖτε is another 2nd person plural imperative—another command.

εἰς τὸν ἕνα is a curious phrase: *one the one*. It has to be an idiom of some sort, as a wooden translation makes no sense. I could find no other biblical or classical sources where this phrase is used.

But it appears in this verse that we have two, roughly synonymous commands, παρακαλεῖτε and οἰκοδομεῖτε. It is reasonable to assume that ἀλλήλους *each other* and εἰς τὸν ἕνα are roughly synonymous direct objects of the verb.

A review of published translations, including NET, NIV, NLT, GNT, and CEV, tells you that there are hundreds of NT scholars who agree with your analysis of this phrase.

A defining characteristic of Hebrew poetry, which so influenced NT writers, is the use of *parallelism*. There are several types of parallelism, but the two types that are of greatest use to us in puzzling out difficult words or phrases are:

- **Synonymous parallelism**, where the second line essentially repeats or restates the first line using different words with the same meaning.¹ For example:

**The earth is the LORD's, and all it contains,
The world, and those who dwell in it.**

- **Antithetic parallelism**, where the second line contrasts with or provides an opposite perspective to the first line. For example:

¹ Chiasm, which we discussed in 5:5, involves a sophisticated use of parallelism.

**The heart of the wise inclines to the right,
but the heart of the fool to the left.**

You can understand how observing this sort of parallelism would help you define unfamiliar words. So for instance if you had an extremely rare word used in this couplet:

The heart of the wise inclines to the right,
but the heart of the fool to the @#\$%.

...then it would be a fairly good guess that @#\$% would be an uncommon word which means *left*.

So here, we have:

Encourage each other
Build up εἰς τὸν ἕνα

This looks more like synonymous parallelism than antithetic parallelism, so it is an easy guess that Paul intended us to understand εἰς τὸν ἕνα as being pretty much the same as ἀλλήλους.

An encouraging aspect of translating this verse is to realize that the translation teams of the published versions—who collectively have several centuries of careful study of the Bible between them—are doing no more than what you can do yourself when they come to εἰς τὸν ἕνα. Look at the phrase. Observe its immediate context. Infer a possible translation.

It is not just the published translations that reinforce your conclusions. BDAG (which represents the input of scores or hundreds more biblical scholars) also thinks that εἰς τὸν ἕνα means *each other*. It specifically mentions 1 Thess 5:11 in definition 5.a of its discussion of the word εἰς.

καθὼς καὶ ποιεῖτε *just as you are already doing*. The καὶ serves to strengthen the conjunction καθὼς. The PB tries to bring out this additional emphasis by saying *just as you are **already** doing*. You could also include something like *indeed* or *in fact*.

ποιεῖτε: is the 2nd person present active indicative plural of ποιέω *to do*. The use of the present tense emphasizes ongoing, current activity. So the Thessalonian believers are engaged in encouraging and building each other up on an ongoing basis, right now.

Excursus: Paul and Matthew's Gospel

The parallels between 1 Thess and Matt. 24 are widely acknowledged, but most people put them down to Paul drawing on a verbal tradition that lay behind the (eventual) Matthew gospel.

But the more I learn about verbal traditions, the more I think they were not a big deal in the eastern Mediterranean of the first century.

Verbal cultures tend to *not* write many things down. Indeed, being able to read and write is not highly valued. Some years ago, I was on staff with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship and got involved with student ministry in what is considered northern British Columbia. This included the high school in Vanderhoof, near which are several native Indian communities. In the entire history of Vanderhoof High School, only one native student had ever gone through to graduate from grade twelve. There were no families who thought that even basic literacy was valuable—so all of the students dropped out before graduation.

One of the missionaries my church supports is a Wycliffe Bible Translator who headed up the third and most recent failed attempt to translate the New Testament into the Cree language, spoken by native Indian communities all over Alberta. The perspective that the Cree have is that anything that is important enough to know should be packaged into a story somebody could tell. Trying to translate the Bible into Cree is, so they believe, a waste of time.

While oral cultures I have knowledge of are fairly deliberate about not writing things down, they are equally deliberate—indeed, are *highly intentional*—about telling stories.

A close friend of mine negotiated the sale of a camp property in British Columbia many years ago to the Chehalis Indian band that lived on a reserve that was adjacent to the camp. His meetings were always with tribal elders...except that present in every meeting was a boy who was 12, another who was 18, and yet another who was 24. It was the job of these three young men to *remember* what was said at these negotiations, and to *tell stories about them* in the years and decades to come.

And then, as they grow old enough to be anticipating their own deaths, to pass these stories on to a new generation of story-tellers.

So the question is, were the inhabitants of the first century eastern Mediterranean world more like white, Euro-Canadians, who write everything down, or were they more like the Chehalis Indians, who told stories and wrote almost nothing down?

The evidence we have suggests that the Greeks wrote about *everything*.¹ The treasure trove of papyrus documents that Grenfell and Hunt discovered amounts to roughly ½ million documents and fragments...of which only 5,000 have yet been translated. But we know they include letters, literary texts, Bible portions, Greek plays, court records, horoscopes, contracts, and wills. Here are some representative examples.

In 1:1, I referred to a letter written by a man to his wife in 1 BC to illustrate the typical way that Greek letters were opened (A to B, greetings!).

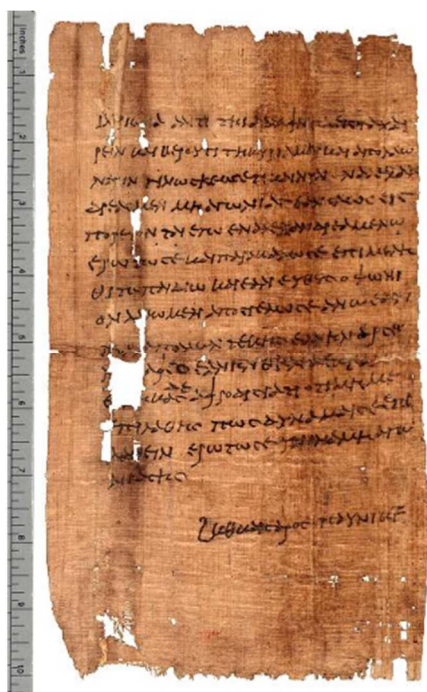
Here is the balance of that letter:²

¹ The Greek corpus that has come down to us is more than 10X larger than the body of Latin writings. [Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), v.]

The Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG) is a database maintained by the University of California, Irvine, of both literary and everyday Greek writings. It

contains 16 million words for the period from Homer to the end of the Koine period.

² All photos of documents in this section have been released under a Creative Commons license, and are available at <https://papyri.info>.



Hilarion to my wife Alis, many greetings, also to my lady Berous and Apollonariion. Know that I am still in Alexandria; and do not worry if they wholly set out, I am staying in Alexandria. I ask you and entreat you, take care of the child, and if I receive my pay soon, I will send it up to you. Above all, if you bear a child and it is male, let it be; if it is female, cast it out. You have told Aphrodisias, "Do not forget me." But how can I forget you? Thus I'm asking you not to worry. The 29th year of Caesar, Pauni 23 (i.e. June 17, 1 B.C.).¹

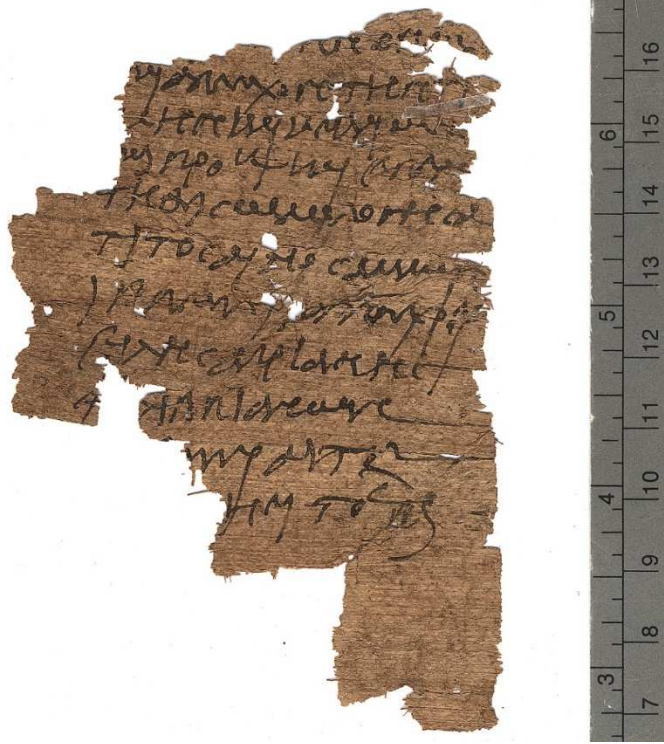
This kind of casual use of letter writing by somebody far enough down in the food chain that he has to wait to get his pay...this does not point to an oral culture. (Also, his wife was literate enough to read this letter.)²

¹ Ἰλαρίωνα Ἄλιτι τῇ ἀδελφῇ πλείστα χαίρειν καὶ Βεροῦτι τῇ κυρίᾳ μου καὶ Ἀπολλωναριν. γίνωσκε ὡς ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἐν Ἀλεξανδρέα σμεν· μὴ ἀγωνιάς ἐὰν ὅλως εἰσπορεύονται, ἐγὼ ἐν Ἀλεξανδρέα μενῶ. ἐρωτῶ σε καὶ παρακαλῶ σε ἐπιμελεθῇ τῷ παιδίῳ καὶ ἐὰν εὐθὺς ὁψώνιον λάβωμεν ἀποστελῶ σε ἄνω. ἐὰν πολλὰ πολλῶν τέκης ἐὰν ἦν ἄρσενον ἄφες, ἐὰν ἦν θήλεα ἐκβαλε. εἴρηκας ἰδὲ/ Ἀφροδισιάτι ὅτι μὴ με

ἐπιλάθης· πῶς δύνάμαί σε ἐπιλαθεῖν; ἐρωτῶ σε οὖν ἵνα μὴ ἀγωνιάσης.
(ἔτους) κθ Καίσαρος Παῦνι κγ.
Grenfell and Hunt, op. cit.,
<https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;4:744>

² Though it is possible that there was some other person in the household who was literate who read this letter to Alis.

Other documents of interest include a receipt.

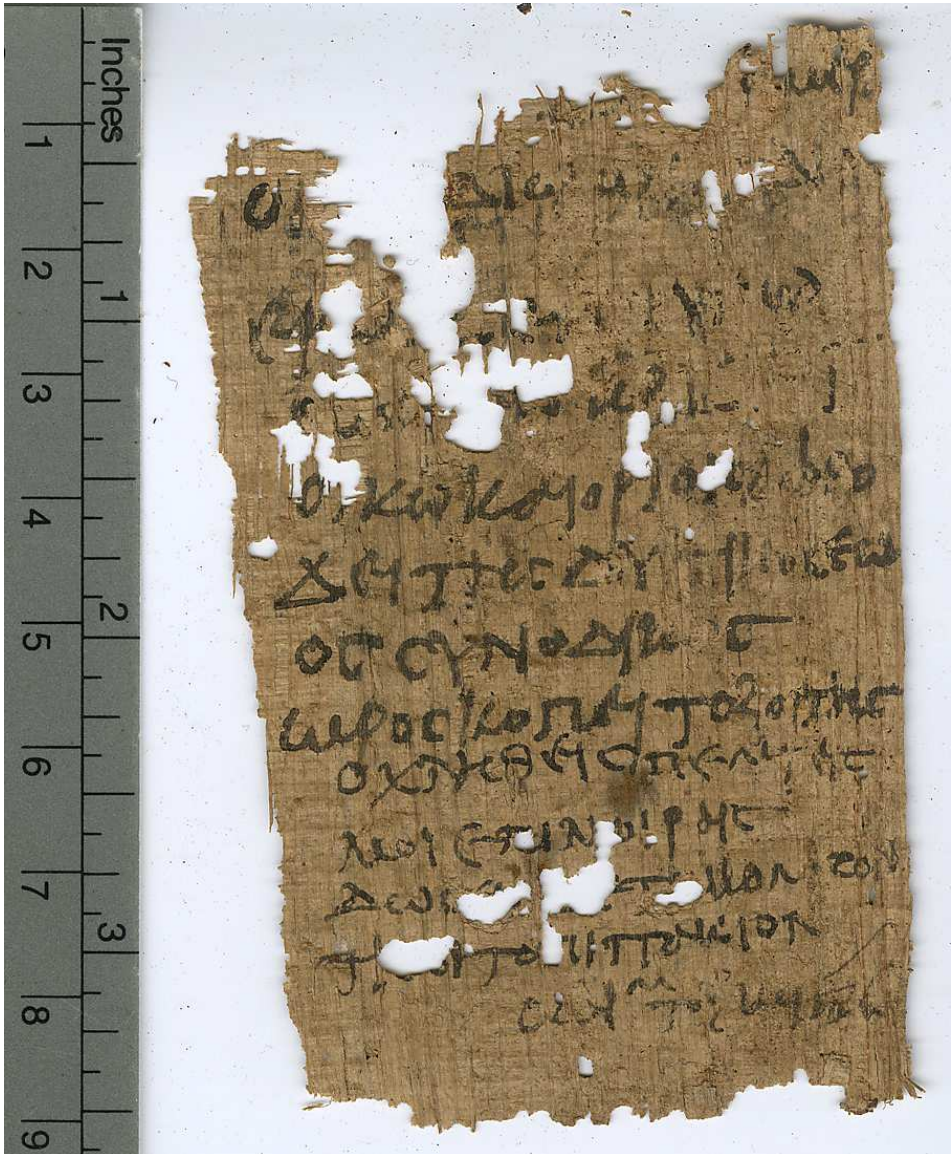


It reads, in part, *I have sold the donkey and received the price and shall guarantee (it) as aforesaid, and in reply to the formal question I consented.*¹

This document is a horoscope for a newborn baby.²

¹ R. A. Coles, D. Montserrat, and J. R. Rea, eds. *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Volume LXIX*" (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2005), P.Oxy.69.4746.

² P. Schubert, ed., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Volume LXI*. (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1995), P.Oxy. LXI 4279.



Grenfell and Hunt even discovered a bribery contract during their dig in 1903-04. It is the first known agreement to fix a sporting event.

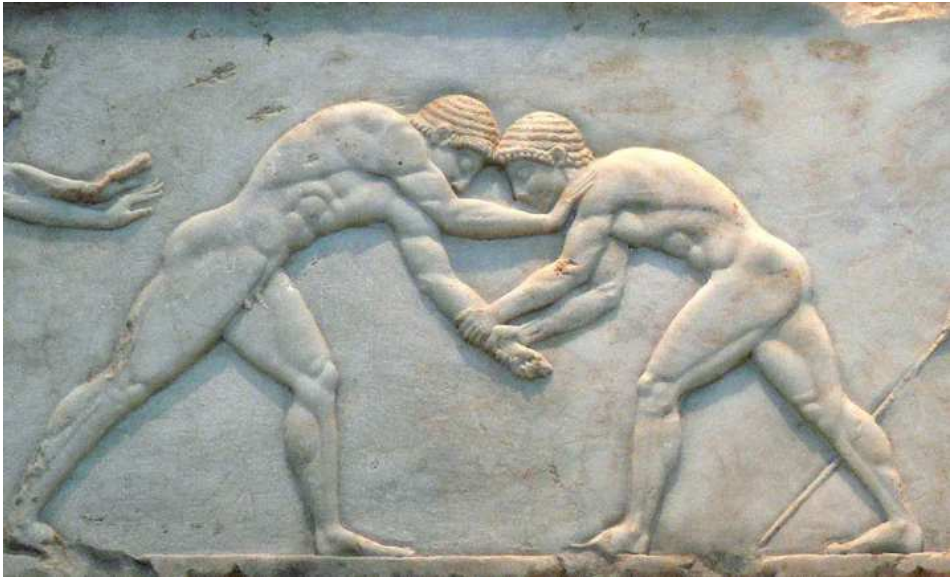


Photo: [Wikimedia Commons/Fingalo](#)

The document details an agreement to fix a wrestling match between two teenage wrestlers:

- **Participants:** Nicantinous and Demetrius
- **Date:** The 14th year of the Roman emperor Gallienus (AD 267)
- **Location:** Antinoopolis, on the Nile
- **Event:** A final bout in the sacred games honoring a deified youth named Antinous

Terms of the Agreement

The contract, which was agreed upon by Nicantinous' father and Demetrius' trainers, stipulates the following:

- Demetrius must "fall three times and yield".
- For intentionally losing the match, Demetrius would be paid 3,800 drachmas.

- If Demetrius were to renege on the deal, his party would owe a penalty of 18,000 drachmas.¹



¹ L. Ingrams, et al. eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Volume XXXIV*. (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1968).

It is absolutely true that in the rabbinic schools of the Pharisees, there was an enormous emphasis on the *oral Torah*—what Jesus called the *traditions of the elders*.¹

It is also absolutely true that none of the Twelve had the opportunity to benefit from the sort of education that a rabbinic school offered.²

Summary

The Eastern Mediterranean culture was a highly literate one. And in a literate culture, disciplined transmission of oral content tends to wither away. In the words of Henry Jones Sr. in the third Indiana Jones movie, *I write it down so I don't have to remember it*.

My conclusion is that Paul was using the *written* account of Jesus' Mount-of-Olives talk from Matthew as he composed this letter in AD 50.

This conclusion leaves me out of step with most of the people involved in NT studies. However, it leaves me in agreement with 100% of the early Christians who had anything to say about the composition of the Gospels. In addition to the internal evidence from 1 Thess., their witness is not to be casually dismissed.

For instance, Origen said, in a commentary written around A.D. 210: *Concerning the four Gospels, which alone are unquestionable in the Church of God under heaven, that first was written that according to Matthew, who was once a tax collector but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, who published it for those who from Judaism came to believe....Secondly, that according to Mark....*³

¹ Though even they used written aids to memorization: Birger Gerhardsson, transl. by Eric J. Sharpe, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Uppsala: Amquist & Wiksells), 29.

² Acts 4:13 When they observed the confidence that Peter and John had, and realized that they were uneducated,

ordinary men they were astonished. They recognized that these men had been companions of Jesus.

³ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History, Volume II: Books 6-10*, Translated by J. E. L. Oulton, Loeb Classical Library 265. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 75.

People arguing for a late date for Matthew would be like historians in A.D. 3924 saying that Winston Churchill's famous speech where he said, after the evacuation of Dunkirk:

We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.

...was delivered not on June 4, 1940, but was in fact composed by history enthusiasts in the mid-21st century.

As I type these words, the children and grandchildren of people who actually heard this speech delivered are still alive. So who are the people in the 40th century to believe? Their own scholars, or people from the 21st century with direct connections to eyewitnesses and friends of Churchill?

Further, one of the stories told by early Christians¹ was that the Apostle Thomas left for India around the time Paul was writing this letter.² It is easy to imagine that the church in Jerusalem would want to send a written account of the life of Jesus with Thomas before he left on a one-way, 5,000 km trip to India. It would be helpful for Thomas to be able to make a copy of Matthew to leave with each new congregation that he planted.

Prior to becoming the dean of the School of Theology in Alexandria, in A.D. 180, Pantaenus travelled as a missionary to India and found churches that possessed copies of the Gospel of Matthew.³

However, as a student of the Bible, you need to keep a clear priority on the text, and not on what Bob Goethe *thinks* or *imagines* about it. You want to pay heed to D.A. Carson's warning about interpreters who reveal more about themselves than they do about the Scriptures.⁴

However, we are not *just* dealing with what Bob can or cannot imagine himself doing if he were making a one-way missionary journey across the sea. The early

¹ Didascalia Apostolorum: The Catholic Teaching of the Twelve Apostles and Holy Disciples of Our Saviour, Translated by R. Hugh Connolly. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 58.

² The Mar Toma (St. Thomas) Church of Kerala, South India, points back to the arrival of Thomas in the mid-first century

as the genesis of their Christian community.

³ Eusebius, op. cit., 5.10.

⁴ D. A. Carson, ed. *New Testament Commentary Survey*. 7th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 2013

believers' accounts that the Gospel of Matthew was written first, and the evidence of its use by Paul in this letter constitute hard data that any biblical interpreter needs to take into account.

Does This Matter?

Perhaps not. It is certainly possible to translate 1 Thessalonians without giving Matthew a second thought.

On the other hand, my objective is that my Bible reading should engage with every aspect of my self: my intellect, my emotions, my choices, my imagination.

As I try to enter imaginatively into whatever text I am reading, I try to visualize what was in the biblical writer's mind, what the issues were that motivated their writing, the tone of voice they used as they dictated, the kind of room they were in as they wrote. And while I want to always focus primarily on the main point that the biblical writer was trying to make, I also follow up on any things that make me curious.

So it is that when I first translated Mark 1:6, I ended up researching the nutritional content of insects, and my Bible study notes include a recipe for Crispy Cricket Chocolate Chip Cookies.

It also led me to this observation:

I think that for people like John and Jesus, the kind of frenzied time management we practice was simply not possible.

Yes, a pound of locusts has 50% more protein than a pound of steak...but it takes time to GATHER a pound of locusts. That is a LOT of insects. Gathering them would have given you a lot of time to decompress from the time you spent with people.

Hiking 20 miles is a big deal for us...but Jesus did it all the time. There was a lot of time to chat on the trail with the people who were walking along with you.

I find that as I engage my imagination, feed my curiosity, and ponder levels of personal application, it simply makes Bible reading and translation more *fun*. And *fun* is probably the biggest reason for thinking about the correspondences between Matthew's account of Jesus' Mount of Olives talk and Paul's letter to Thessalonica.

5:12

We are asking you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge the role of the ones who work hard for you, and guide you in the Lord and teach you.

Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί *We are asking you, brothers and sisters.* δὲ, in its accustomed spot as the second word in the sentence, is not functioning as a conjunction here as much as it is the marker of a new thought—a new paragraph.

ὑμᾶς is in the accusative case, since it is the direct object of the verb Ἐρωτῶμεν. We are asking...asking *whom?* Asking *you*.

This is a good time to notice again that the editor of our SBLGNT writes out everything in lower case Greek letters—except where there is a new section starting. It is a judgement call on his part—a judgement that you and I will share, based on our reading of the context—that we have stopped talking about the return of the Lord Jesus, and its implications. Paul has started a new section here, full of parting exhortations. The editor flags this by beginning Ἐρωτῶμεν with an upper case letter.¹

ἀδελφοί is tagged by STEP Bible as being in the vocative case. That is because, with this word, Paul is directly addressing the Thessalonian believers by name. And because there is no indication in the context that he intends his remarks only for the men, it is appropriate to consider this a consider this a generic masculine, and translate it as *brothers and sisters*.

εἰδέναι τοὺς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν *to acknowledge the ones who labor among you.*

The infinitive εἰδέναι is not easy to translate in this passage. More is meant than the usual *to know, to understand, or to recognize....*²

A better rendering takes εἰδέναι in the sense of *to acknowledge, respect, honor, recognized meanings for the verb* (see LSJ, 483 and BDAG s.v. οἶδα 6), This is also the way the word is usually translated in 1 Cor. 16:18.

κοπιῶντας is an accusative plural participle from κοπιάω, meaning *working hard, laboring*. The article τοὺς turns this participle into a noun as we render it

¹ Paul's original would have been in all-uppercase-letters, with no punctuation.

²² Wanamaker, op. cit., 192.

those who. So the two word phrase is *those who labor*. It is accusative, because it is the direct object of the infinitive εἰδέναι. The prepositional phrase ἐν ὑμῖν *in you* or *among you* gives more information about this group of people who are laboring.

It was the practice of first century Greek speakers to always follow ἐν with a dative noun or pronoun, and so it is here with ὑμῖν as a dative plural.

καὶ προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν ἐν κυρίῳ *and guide you in the Lord*. The accusative plural article τοὺς governs not just the participle κοπιῶντας, but προϊσταμένους and νουθετοῦντας as well. This is one group of people who do these three things for the Thessalonians.

You may be puzzled by the two dots over the iota in προϊσταμένους. This indicates that the o and the i are not a diphthong, pronounced together, but are to be pronounced as two separate vowels. So not **proy**-sta-me-nous, but **pro-ee**-sta-me-nous.

By its place in the context, ὑμῶν has got to be the direct object of the participle προϊσταμένους. This is true even though it is genitive rather than accusative. Presumably if I drilled down deep enough in my Greek grammar books, I would find a rule someplace that explained this use of the genitive with this particular verb. But the translation of this word that is self-evident to me here is used by every other published translation. So rather than obsessing over one word, I shall press on in my translation.

These people guiding the Thessalonians are doing so ἐν κυρίῳ *in the Lord* or perhaps *in the way of the Lord*.

καὶ νουθετοῦντας ὑμᾶς *and teach you*. νου is a slightly uncommon syllable, and it comes as no surprise that the verb νουθετέω is a compound word, the first part of which is from νοῦς mind. The second part of the word is less obvious, but is derived from τίθημι *to put, to place*. So Greek coined this word to mean *to put in mind* or *to teach*.

Unlike in the phrase before, where the genitive ὑμῶν was the object of the preposition, here the more typical accusative ὑμᾶς is used to indicate the direct object.

The parallel structure of the three participles, κοπιῶντας, προϊσταμένους, and νοουθετοῦντας, all sharing a single article τοὺς, suggests these are not three separate groups but rather three aspects of the same leadership role.

A good application of this verse would be to write a note of appreciation to the pastor of your church, and others on the leadership team. Working hard is characteristic of many leaders, and burnout is an issue. We cannot solve that problem with a single note, but it is a start.

Suggesting that the pastor take a sabbatical for 1 month or 3 would be a good second step. An added benefit of the sabbatical idea is that it might give others in the congregation a chance to preach a sermon on some passage that has moved them. You of course, will preach on the return of Jesus from 1 Thessalonians. (☹_☹)

5:13

And give them a special place in your hearts, loving them for the work they do on your behalf. Be at peace with each other.

καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι αὐτοὺς *and to regard them*. Verses 12 and 13 are one long sentence in Greek. The first part of this verse continues the thought from verse 12, with the infinitive ἡγεῖσθαι *to regard/consider* serving as a complementary infinitive (as was εἰδέναι *to acknowledge*) to the previous verse's Ἐρωτῶμεν *we ask*.

ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ *the very highest respect*, another one of Paul's *hyper*— words, is extremely rare. It does not appear in classical Greek literature. It's not found in the Septuagint (LXX). It's absent from known papyri from the period. It appears to be a word Paul coined. He wanted the Thessalonians to *hyper-respect* their leaders.

Briefly, Paul is saying Ἐρωτῶμεν *We ask you* εἰδέναι *to acknowledge your leaders* καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι αὐτοὺς *and to regard them highly*.

ἐν ἀγάπῃ *in/with love*. ἐν is once again, as always, followed by a noun/pronoun in the dative case. Here it the noun ἀγάπη. He wants the Believers to respect and honor their leaders, and to do so with real affection for them.

διὰ τὸ ἔργον αὐτῶν *because of their work*. διὰ can be followed either by a genitive or by an accusative. When followed by an accusative, as here with τὸ ἔργον the work, it means because of. αὐτῶν *of them* is a genitive plural performing one of

the standard tasks of the genitive—to express possession or ownership. So Paul is talking about *their* work.

εἰρηνεύετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς. *Be at peace with each other.* It is slightly odd that there is no verse division here, as Paul starts a new idea—talking not about how the Believers are to treat their leaders, but how they ought to treat each other.

The verse divisions we use today for the New Testament were established by Robert Estienne, who became the Royal Printer to the French King Francis I in 1539. He published a Greek NT in 1551 that used these verse divisions, which were followed by every subsequent English translation.

Robert's son wrote that his father worked out these verse divisions while on horseback, during the 10 or 11 days of a trip from Paris to Lyons.

As with the word Ἐρωτῶμεν at the beginning of verse 12, εἰρηνεύετε is a 2nd person plural imperative—a command to *live at peace/try to get along with each other*.

ἐν is often translated as *in*. But we have seen it several times in this letter with the sense of *with*.¹ So ἐν ἑαυτοῖς would be rendered *with each other* or *among yourselves*.

STEPBible says that ἑαυτοῖς is a *reflexive* pronoun. This means that it is a pronoun that refers back to the subject of the verb (in this case, the Thessalonians). In English, reflexive pronouns end in "-self" or "-selves," as demonstrated in phrases like "She threw herself to the floor".

It is pretty easy for us to rationalize exceptions to the general rule of respecting the leaders in the church, or avoiding/resolving conflict with other church members. After all, leaders need to *earn* respect, and sometimes you have to stand for what is *right* (or even more, stand for *your* rights) rather than seeking to get along with others at any cost.

But Paul's commands here are clear, and he is articulating the priorities of God himself. To treat these commands as either optional, or irrelevant in our

¹ E.g., οὐκ ἐγενήθη εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν λόγῳ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει The Gospel came to you not **with** words only but **with** power.

particular situations, is to risk having God become...ah...**peevied** with us. That is almost surely a bad, bad things.

5:14

We encourage you, brothers and sisters, to warn those who are undisciplined, encourage the demoralized, care for the sick, and be patient with all.

παρακαλοῦμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί *We encourage you, brothers and sisters.* The conjunction δὲ in this verse, positioned as normal as the second word of the sentence, has less of a conjunctive function than it does as a connective, linking this exhortation to the previous discussion about community relationships.

ὑμᾶς is in the accusative case, as the word *you* is the direct object of the verb. As in every other instance in 1 Thessalonians, the vocative case ἀδελφοί is best rendered as brothers and sisters, since Paul is addressing his commands to both women and men.

There is no indication here that Paul is addressing just the leaders. With ἀδελφοί, the same ἀδελφοί he used in verse 12, Paul is addressing the whole body of believers. The commands of this verse are directed at all those who are following Jesus.

νουθετεῖτε...παραμυθεῖσθε...ἀντέχεσθε...μακροθυμεῖτε *warn, encourage, care, be patient.* In this commentary, I generally assume you can sort out word endings on your own, either because you recognize them, or because <https://stepbible.org> gives you an excellent word analysis whenever you click on a Greek word.

But this sequence of four commands provides us with an opportunity to observe the endings for imperative verbs. Since Paul is addressing a group of people directly, all these commands are in the 2nd person plural.

The standard ending for 2nd person present active imperative plural commands, for verbs that end in —ω, is —ετε.

We have two —ω verbs in this set of four, νουθετέω and μακροθυμέω. Our first thought is that if we drop the ω and add an ετε, we should get νουθετέετε and μακροθυμέετε.

But in the evolution of the Greek language, *εε* was a no-no. Consequently, the two short vowels *εε* became the long diphthong *εῖ*. Hence, the imperative for these two verbs is *νουθετεῖτε* and *μακροθυμεῖτε*.

While most Greek verbs have —*ω* endings, there are other families of verbs. The dictionary form of the remaining two imperatives is *παραμυθέομαι* and *ἀντέχομαι*. The 2nd person plural ending for —*ομαι* verbs is —*εσθε*. That makes the 2nd person plural imperative for *ἀντέχομαι* *ἀντέχεσθε*.

As we saw with two verbs above, the Greeks felt like having two short vowels next to each other in *παραμυθέεσθε* was just *not right*. So they converted the *εε* into a long-vowel diphthong *εῖ*. So the imperative form of this word is *παραμυθεῖσθε*.

νουθετεῖτε τοὺς ἀτάκτους *warn the undisciplined*. τοὺς ἀτάκτους is accusative case, since it is the direct object of the verb. It is not clear exactly what form being *ἄτακτος* might have taken. But there may be a clue in 4:11, where Paul tells the Thessalonian to *work with your own hands, just as we taught you*. He also makes a point of reminding them, in 2:9, that *Night and day, we worked so as not to be a burden on any of you as we preached to you the Good News of God*.

Our economy is quite different from that of the Roman Empire. Unemployment is for some a heartbreaking fact of life, from which escape is difficult. Many jobs have specialized prerequisites.

But even in our culture, if somebody starts to sponge off his brothers and sisters, looking for financial support when he *could* be working—even if the available job is not the *dream job* hoped for; even if the available job is menial—I have little doubt that Paul’s command would be unchanged.

Laziness is a spiritual issue; one that church leaders must address in every century.

There is one contemporary issue, however, that Paul did not engage with, nor could he have foreseen it: spending too much time with electronic devices.

One could speculate that Paul might have felt that Believers who were being *ἄτακτος undisciplined* around social media or pornography should be admonished or warned by mature Christians.

παραμυθεῖσθε τοὺς ὀλιγοψύχους *encourage the demoralized* is a parallel command: an imperative verb followed by an accusative object. ὀλιγόψυχος

was an obvious compound word whose meaning would have been plain even to those who did not recognize the word from elsewhere in Greek literature.¹ *ὀλίγος* means *small, few*. *ψυχή* means *breath, soul*. So *ὀλιγόψυχος* means *timid, disheartened, demoralized*—people who feel left out.

The word does not exist in the New Testament, but you might correctly expect that *μεγαλόψυχος* (where *μεγας* means *great*; the English prefix *mega* comes straight from Greek) describes a person who is self-confident and big-hearted.

ἀντέχεσθε τῶν ἀσθενῶν *care for the sick*. The genitive case of *τῶν ἀσθενῶν* is governed by this verb, as *ἀντέχομαι* typically takes a genitive object. *ἀσθενής* is an adjective that means, variously in the NT, *sick, weak, helpless, afflicted with calamities*.

Most published versions—NET, GNT, NIV, NLT, CEV— translate this command as *help the weak*. This is certainly an acceptable translation.

It does however make *ἀντέχεσθε τῶν ἀσθενῶν* mean almost the same thing as *παραμυθεῖσθε τοὺς ὀλιγοψύχους*. If the final command of the four here meant much the same thing as the first, *warn the undisciplined*, then I would think we had a case of chiasm here, which would suggest that the two innermost commands might be equivalent.

However, *be patient with all* is not at all equivalent to *warn the undisciplined*. This suggests to me that we have four moderately distinct commands. Intervening in how people approach their jobs is a very practical thing to do—that goes beyond simple *spiritual counsel*. This practical flavor of the verse leads me to adopt *the sick* as a translation of *τῶν ἀσθενῶν*.²

Notwithstanding all this, *support the weak* would be a good thing to do with people who have a YouTube addiction, or those who spiral into dark thoughts as a result of TikTok algorithms.

¹ The word is used several times in the LXX, including Isaiah 35:4, 54:6, 57:1, Proverbs 14:29 and 18:14.

² As I have said in several other places in this commentary, if you have *just-Bob*

arguing for one translation, and hundreds of scholars arguing for a different translation, your safest option is to go with the majority.

μακροθυμεῖτε πρὸς πάντας *be patient toward everybody*. πρὸς can be followed by a dative, or a genitive, or an accusative. When followed by an accusative, as it is here with πάντας, πρὸς indicates the *direction* or *object* of the patience. In Canadian Standard English, however, we phrase this as *being patient **with** people*, rather than *showing patience **toward** them*.

Hence, the PB translates πρὸς as *with* rather than attempting a more mechanical translation using *to* or *toward*.

5:15

See that no one gives back evil for evil, but always give back good — to each other and to others as well.

After thinking through the form of imperative verbs in the last verse, you will be unsurprised that the 2nd person plural imperative of ὁράω is formed by dropping the final ω, then taking the two short vowels of **αε** in ὁρά**ετε**, and morphing them into a long vowel **ᾱ**, giving us ὁρά**ετε** *See or See that*.

ὁράτε μή τις κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ τινι ἀποδῶ *See that nobody gives back evil for evil*. When ὁράω is used as an imperative, particularly with μή, it functions as a warning, *beware that not, take heed that not*.

In this situation, where a warning is issued which includes a μή, the verb that follows will be in the subjunctive mood.¹ Further, the aorist subjunctive functions as an equivalent to the future tense. So ὁράτε μή τις ἀποδῶ is *Beware that τις nobody* (nominative case, since τις is the subject of the verb ἀποδῶ in the clause that follows ὁράτε μή) *gives back* (in the future, from now henceforth).

κακὸν is in the accusative, since it is the object of the verb *to give back*. The dative pronoun τινι functions as the indirect object, indicating the recipient of the retaliatory action. *Beware that nobody gives back evil τινι to anyone ἀντὶ κακοῦ in return for evil*.

The preposition ἀντὶ is typically followed by a genitive case noun to indicate substitution or exchange—in *place of* or *in return for*. Thus, we have evil being returned for evil.

¹ Smyth, *Grammar*, op. cit., §2225.

ἀλλὰ πάντοτε τὸ ἀγαθὸν διώκετε *but always strive for good*. ἀλλὰ is a forceful conjunction *but*, and introduces the positive alternative to retaliation. τὸ ἀγαθὸν *the good* appears as an accusative neuter singular, serving as the direct object of διώκετε.

If you just finished translating verse 14, with its sequence of four imperative verbs, then you should recognize διώκετε as having a 2nd person plural imperative ending. BDAG's definition 4.b for διώκω is *to pursue, strive for, seek after, aspire to*. Paul commands not just passive non-retaliation but active pursuit of good.

εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας *toward each other and toward everybody*. The final phrase employs the preposition εἰς with two accusative objects, indicating the direction or recipients of the good actions. ἀλλήλους refers specifically to fellow believers, while πάντας broadens the scope to include all people, even those outside the body of Believers.

Paul's prohibition against returning evil for evil is particularly relevant in digital spaces. The immediate and public nature of social media often tempts Christians to engage in retaliatory behavior online, whether through harsh comments, negative reviews, or public criticism.

5:16

Rejoice always.

The issue here is not one of translation. **πάντοτε χαίρετε** *Always rejoice* is easy to render into English, but difficult to put into practice.

It is important to keep in mind the context for this command. This verse does not materialize out of thin air, but follows from what has just been written. It is rooted in the people's confidence in their salvation and in the return of Jesus which will be the culmination of that salvation. Keeping Jesus' return constantly in mind, with the awareness that it could happen ten minutes from anytime, will shine a light on our current difficulties.

Paul built a foundation for the command of 5:16 back in 1:6, where he says that the Thessalonians found joy in the good news about Jesus, even though it came with persecution.

This whole area of joy is a theme in Paul's writings. He develops this a bit further in the letter he would eventually write to the Christians in Corinth. In 4:8-10 (Phillips) he says: *We are handicapped on all sides, but we are never frustrated; we are puzzled, but never in despair. We are persecuted, but we never have to stand it alone: we may be knocked down but we are never knocked out! Every day we experience something of the death of the Lord Jesus, so that we may also know the power of the life of Jesus in these bodies of ours.*

For Paul, it was not just about being aware of the return of Jesus, who would set everything right and heal every wound. Rather, he found there was some sort of connection between sharing in the suffering—and even death—of Jesus, and experiencing something of his life in consequence.

Figuring out how to *Rejoice always* goes beyond an intellectual appreciation for the command. The imperative is clear. The task is there before us. It is something that we may spend the next forty years learning how to incorporate it into our emotional lives.

5:17

Cultivate an attitude of continual prayer.

ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε *Pray unceasingly.* By looking at the —εσθε ending, you should recognize that the second word is an imperative from προσεύχομαι.

The —ως ending is a tip off that you may be looking at an adverb. This is very common in Greek, as one could convert an adjective into an adverb by adding —ως. In this case, ἀδιάλειπτος *unceasing, continuous* the adjective becomes the adverb ἀδιαλείπτως *unceasingly, continuously*.

This connects back to verse 16. An essential foundation of constant joy in the midst of persecution and other troubles-in-life is constant prayer.¹

As with verse 16, the issue with this verse is not one of translation into text on the page, but translation into the fabric of our lives. The task is not just to pray

¹ James Everett Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, International

Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1912), 201.

intercessions in formal settings, but to have an ongoing internal conversation with God.

As I type these words, it is January in Edmonton, Canada, and the wind is gusting up to 50 kph and creating swirling vortexes of snow—2 or 3 meters in diameter and taller than the house—outside my window. As I watch these, there is an opportunity to worship the God whose whimsical sense of esthetics sets these snow pillars spinning in my front yard.¹

I was probably 15 years old when I first decided to try to apply this verse in my life. Now, after 56 years of practice, when I am not asleep or speaking aloud to other people, my inner man is often in dialogue with God.

During the years I worked as a computer programmer, I was always in a discussion with God, so to speak, about the proper way to write code to make it do what it needed to do. And particularly when there was a serious software bug that needed eradicating, I would pray that the Holy Spirit would give me good logic and good intuitions as I sought to understand the origin of the software behavior.²

5:18

In all situations give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

ἐν παντὶ εὐχαριστεῖτε *In everything give thanks.* I have said before that ἐν is always followed by a dative noun or pronoun. But one thing you have seen about Greek—which is true of human languages generally—is that it is flexible.

¹ It is whimsical and delightful as long as I am in a warm house looking out through a window. If I had to be out of doors today, it would be enormously cold. If I were in that situation, I'm not sure if I would be drawn to worship in quite the same fashion. I might be more given to thanksgiving for a warm house with a roof that does not leak.

² Once, during my mammography years, a bug appeared in a software update that could—if an obscure and unlikely set of conditions were met—tell a patient with a serious and well developed breast cancer that she was completely healthy.

This became evident to me on a

Friday afternoon. I had a bad weekend—during which time I really DID pray without ceasing—trying to track down this problem, buried in a hundred thousand lines of code.

Happily (very happily indeed!), across the whole breadth of N. America, there was not a single woman who had the necessary conditions that would result in her getting an incorrect diagnosis from our app during the time it was broken. I was rejoicing in the Lord when I was able to circulate a software fix first thing on Monday morning.

Here it is followed by a dative *adjective*. The reality is that Greek writers sometimes use adjectives as though they were nouns.

We do this in English as well. One scenarios is when we refer to groups of people: *the rich, the poor, the elderly, the unemployed*. In these phrases, we're using adjectives as nouns to represent entire categories of people. For instance, in the sentence *The rich should help the poor*, both *rich* and *poor* are adjectives functioning as nouns.

We also see this pattern with abstract concepts. When we say *for the good of all*, we're using the adjective *good* as a noun meaning *benefit* or *welfare*. Similarly, in phrases like *in the abstract* or *in general*, we're using adjectives as though they were nouns following prepositions, just like the Greek ἐν παντί.

Being in the midst of a group of commands, you should be able to look at εὐχαριστεῖτε and break it down. The verb εὐχαριστέω drops the final —ω and adds an —ετε, giving us εὐχαριστέετε. The two short vowels contract into a long diphthong → εὐχαριστεῖτε *give thanks*.

τοῦτο γὰρ θέλημα θεοῦ *for this is the will of God*. We have observed before that γὰρ *for* appears as the second word in a sentence. Here we do not have a new sentence but rather what is called a *clause*. So we need to adjust our thinking a bit to expect γὰρ as the second word in a sentence or clause.

To explain this a bit further, I am going to use some specialized terms that you will run into if you use a conventional Greek textbook or grammar.¹

In Ancient Greek, a *sentence* is a complete unit of thought that can stand on its own, while a *clause* is a group of words containing a subject and predicate that may or may not form a complete thought.

A predicate is everything in a clause that tells us something about the subject. Think of it as answering the question "What about the subject?" The predicate must contain a verb, but it often includes more than just the verb alone.

¹ You should notice, however, that it is only now, at the end of the book of 1 Thessalonians, that I am introducing these terms. Many Greek teachers start off with

these kind of terms in the first week of class.

Think of a sentence as a complete musical composition, while clauses are like the individual phrases within that composition. A sentence in Greek must contain at least one main (independent) clause, but it can also include multiple dependent clauses.

Here's a simple example to illustrate:

ὁ ἄνθρωπος τρέχει. ("The man runs.")

This is both a clause and a complete sentence because it expresses a complete thought with a subject and predicate.

Now consider this more complex example:

ὅτε ὁ ἥλιος ἀνέτελλεν, οἱ στρατιῶται ἐπορεύοντο.

When the sun was rising, the soldiers marched.

This sentence contains two clauses:

1. ὅτε ὁ ἥλιος ἀνέτελλεν *when the sun was rising*—a dependent clause introduced by ὅτε.
2. οἱ στρατιῶται ἐπορεύοντο *the soldiers marched*—the main clause.

Now, back to 5:18. γὰρ is the second word in the *clause*, with the nominative τοῦτο *this* as the subject of the clause. There is no explicit verb in this clause. It is almost a fixed rule in Greek that where there is an implied verb, it will be some variant of a be-verb.¹

So we have an equative nominative construction where the verb *is* is implied. θέλημα is also nominative, and is the second piece of the equative nominative.² So we have τοῦτο ≈ θέλημα. And θεοῦ is capturing a standard use of the genitive, which we translate as *of God*.

¹ Marcus Aurelius, writing around A.D. 175, regularly omits verbs in Book 1 of his *Meditations*. This is an exceptional situation in Ancient Greek, however, as he was writing a diary for himself and probably never intended for anybody else to read what he had written. Translators of

Aurelius have always had a lively debate as to just what actual verbs he might have intended us to understand.

² Also known as the predicate nominative.

ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ *in Christ Jesus*. *God's will in Christ Jesus* may be expressed as *God's will for you as members of the Christian fellowship*. It is while living as an active part of this fellowship, too, that they can carry out God's will effectively ¹

This phrase looks a little odd. ἐν Χριστῷ is OK, as it is ἐν followed by the dative Χριστῷ. But then there is what looks like a genitive Ἰησοῦ. We would expect Χριστῷ and Ἰησοῦ to agree with each other in case—to both be dative. Except that Ἰησοῦ **is** dative.

Greek names—particularly names that have been brought into Greek from other languages—are often irregular. The name Ἰησοῦς conjugates like this

Case	Form
Nominative	Ἰησοῦς
Genitive	Ἰησοῦ
Dative	Ἰησοῦ
Accusative	Ἰησοῦν
Vocative	Ἰησοῦ

So while Ἰησοῦ looks genitive, from the context—where we know it ought to agree with the dative Χριστῷ, as both names together follow ἐν and are part of the prepositional phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ—we know it has to be dative.

There are a number of names that come from Hebrew which are even more irregular. Indeed, the name Ἀβραάμ is what is called indeclinable. That is to say, it never changes its form no matter how the name is used in the sentence.

Nominative	Ἀβραάμ
Genitive	Ἀβραάμ
Dative	Ἀβραάμ
Accusative	Ἀβραάμ
Vocative	Ἀβραάμ

The case we tag this name with is purely determined by its use in the sentence—by context.

The final phrase **εἰς ὑμᾶς** *for you* uses the preposition εἰς + an accusative pronoun, indicating the direction or target of God's will. That ὑμᾶς is a second

¹ Bruce, *Thessalonians*, op. cit., 125.

person *plural* pronoun shows that this instruction is for the entire community, not just select individuals.

I do not think this is *give thanks for every situation*, but *give thanks in every situation*. Some things that happen to us are bad. We know they are bad. God knows they are bad. There is nothing much about the situation, per se, to be thankful for.

However, in the midst of bad situations, we can still be thankful that God is present with us, that God cares for us deeply, and that he will make things right—if not in this life, then certainly at the coming of the Day of the Lord.

There are also places in the NT that talk about how difficult situations can help us mature.¹ I can acknowledge this cognitively, but at an emotional level I still hate difficult situations. At some levels, my inner man *likes* being immature. I do not necessarily *want* to grow. But God is merciful, and gives me what I *need* rather than what I *want*.²

5:19-21

Don't pour cold water on the work of the Holy Spirit. Never treat prophecies with contempt. But on the other hand, think carefully about everything, and hold tightly onto that which is good.

Reading a letter from Paul is like listening to half of a phone conversation. We listen to Paul's answers and have to infer what the situation was that called for such an answer.

It very much appears like there were illegitimate prophets in Thessalonica who were discrediting the whole idea of prophecy. Paul suggests that the Thessalonians ought not say *No!* to the whole idea of prophecy, just because there were some who spoke only from their own thoughts and motives while claiming to speak for God. They should always hold open the possibility that the Holy Spirit might indeed have a prophetic message for them.

¹ James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-5.

² There is a story in my family that one time, while I was living in Japan and having

some real difficulties, my younger sister said, *Mother! Are you praying for patience for Bob again!?*

That said, they should carefully evaluate every prophecy, true or merely alleged, and take to heart the true *Word from the Lord* messages. The false prophecies they discard.

We could wish for a bit more detail on how to distinguish true from false prophecies. All Paul gives us here is to think carefully.

These verses are enormously relevant to us today. The prosperity gospel has established a near-monopoly, worldwide, in large churches. And it is often the case that these same churches have a plethora of prophets giving all sorts of messages—virtually none of which are actually from the Lord.

The temptation that some churches have succumbed to, in reaction to this, is to say that prophecy and other miraculous gifts ceased at the end of the first century.

Paul's words in these verses are a direct rebuke to that response.

τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέννυτε *Do not smother/hinder the Spirit.* In the verses leading up to this one, we have seen several imperative verbs. We have seen how you get a 2nd person plural present imperative by adding —ετε to a verb that ends in —ω, and adding —εσθε to verbs that have—ομαι endings in their dictionary form.

Here, we encounter another family of Greek verbs, ones that end in —μι. To turn these into 2nd person plural imperatives, you add not —ετε, but just —τε. So then the verb σβέννυμι to dampen/hinder/extinguish becomes σβέννυτε.

τὸ πνεῦμα is accusative, as it is the direct object of the verb. The implied subject of the verb is you. The verb is *do not extinguish*. The object, the person to not extinguish, is *the Spirit*. σβέννυμι is typically used for extinguishing fire or light, making this a vivid metaphor for suppressing the Spirit's activity.

προφητείας μὴ ἔξουθενεῖτε *Do not treat prophecies with contempt* has the same structure as in verse 19. The negative μὴ *no/not* with the imperative ἔξουθενεῖτε *treat with contempt/make nothing of* and the accusative direct object προφητείας *prophecies*.

To the extent that there is a standard sentence in Greek, it probably follows the pattern of *verb-noun-other*. By putting the object at the beginning of these

sentences,¹ there is a deliberate deviation from this pattern. This is typically done for emphasis. So Paul is seeking to emphasize τὸ πνεῦμα and προφητείας.

πάντα δὲ δοκιμάζετε *But think carefully about everything.* In verse 21, δὲ serves as a conjunction that sets up a contrast between the positive commands that follow and the negative ones of vss. 19-20. δοκιμάζετε (test) is another present imperative, but this time without μὴ, making it a positive command. The word carries connotations of testing metals for purity,² suggesting careful examination rather than quick acceptance or rejection.

τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε *hold tightly onto that which is good.* The Greek article in this verse demonstrates its superpower, which is to be able to turn almost any word into a noun. Here it converts the adjective καλός into a noun, *the good thing* or simply *what is good*.

Some denominations reject any contemporary prophetic gifting (effectively *despising prophecies*), while others may accept prophetic words without sufficient testing. The Thessalonian balance of openness with discernment remains relevant.

Paul's command to *test everything* is particularly pertinent. North American Christians face a constant stream of new spiritual trends, teachings, and claimed revelations through social media and other platforms, making careful discernment essential.

These issues mirror the Thessalonian church's need to navigate between complete rejection of spiritual gifts and uncritical acceptance of all claimed spiritual manifestations.

5:22

Avoid every sort of evil.

ἀπὸ παντὸς εἵδους πονηροῦ ἀπέχεσθε *Stay away from every sort of evil.* ἀπέχεσθε is an interesting imperative. It has the —εσθε ending that goes with an —ομαι verb, and yet the dictionary form of the word is ἀπέχω.

¹ Which is called *fronting* the object. That is, putting the object in front of the verb.

² 1 Peter 1:7, Sirach 2:5, Wisdom of Solomon 3:6. Compare 1 Cor. 3:13.

This is going to get us into an interesting bit of Greek thinking and the grammar that grows out of that thinking.

Active voice verbs indicate that the subject of the sentence did the action of the verb. *I brushed the child's teeth.* *Brushed* is active voice, because the *I* of the sentence is the one doing the action of the verb, *brushing*.

Passive voice verbs indicate that the grammatical subject of the sentence is not the do-er of the action. The child's teeth were brushed by me. Here, *teeth* is the subject, but it is not doing the brushing. The action of the verb is being done *by me*.

Middle voice verbs are more difficult for us to understand, since English has no middle voice. Here, the subject of the verb acts upon itself or for its own benefit. In Greek, *I brushed my teeth* would have the verb in the middle voice, since I am the one doing the action, and I am also the one receiving the action. As a bonus, in brushing my teeth I am acting for my own benefit—preventing myself from getting cavities.

—ω verbs in the middle voice and those in the passive voice alike have —ομαι endings. There are some verbs in Greek, however, that do not have an —ω word form. They exist *only* as verbs with —ομαι endings. This is true of the verbs παραμυθέομαι and ἀντέχομαι that we discussed in 5:14.

Traditionally, these have been called *deponent verbs*—verbs that exist only with passive or middle endings (passive and middle endings are the same, you recall) which function as though they have active voice meanings.

However, a turning point in our understanding of deponent verbs occurred at the 2010 Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) conference, where scholars reached a consensus that deponency should be abandoned as a grammatical category.

Modern scholars argue that these so-called deponent verbs are actually proper middle voice verbs that have been misunderstood. For example, the verb ἔρχομαι *I come/go* is not *active in meaning* but rather expresses an action done in the subject's self-interest.

However, at our level of Greek this is a largely academic argument. Since English *has* no middle voice, we typically translate middle voice verbs as though they were active voice anyway.

The verb ἀπέχω in 5:22 would, then, have a 2nd person present *active* imperative plural form of ἀπέχετε. It also has a 2nd person present *middle* imperative plural of ἀπέχεσθε.

One thing that makes ἀπέχω a bit odd is that it has a distinctly different meaning in the active voice and the middle voice. In the active voice, ἀπέχω means *to receive in full*. But when it is used with a middle voice ending, it means *to avoid* or *to abstain*.

With the prepositional phrase Paul is saying to *abstain ἀπὸ from παντὸς all/every εἶδους kind/form πονηροῦ of evil*. εἶδους is the genitive form of εἶδος, and is configured as genitive because the preposition ἀπὸ is always followed by a genitive.

In Luke 3:22, the word εἶδος is used of superficial appearance. *the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the bodily appearance εἶδος of a dove*. But in this verse in 1 Thessalonians, Paul is not telling the people to stay away from things that *look* evil. He is telling them to avoid things that *are* evil.

When I was in my early teenaged years, I attended a church that always quoted this verse as it appeared in the KJV: *Abstain from all appearance of evil*. The way this was interpreted there was that if any of the church elders thought some behavior looked bad, they would forbid it.

In practice, this supported a rule-driven approach to following God that was very like that of the Pharisees in Jesus' day. This verse was used to rationalize all sorts of additions to the words of Scripture, like:

- *Do not dance* (Yes, David danced; the Bible even commands dancing;¹ but we are telling you not to do it anyway).
- *Do not join the Boy Scouts*. (I honestly do not know what the issue with Scouting was. Cooking bannock over an open fire and sleeping in a tent was somehow the gateway to Satan worship, maybe?)²

Paul critiques this approach to biblical add-ons in Col. 2:21-22 where he says *Since you died with Christ to the spiritual powers of this world, why do you live*

¹ Ps. 149:3, 30:11. Also see Ecclesiastes 3:4.

² Of course, none of us knew then about the amount of sexual abuse that was occurring

in some Boy Scout troops. My experience with Scouting was nothing but positive, however.

as if you had to obey such rules as: “Do not handle **this**! Do not taste **that**! Do not touch **this other thing**!”?

5:23

May the God of peace himself make you thoroughly holy, and may he keep every aspect of your being—spirit, mind, and body—whole and blameless until the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἀγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὁλοτελεῖς *May the God of peace himself make you completely holy.* As we have seen on several occasions in this epistle, δὲ is here serving less as a conjunction and more as a transitional marker, indicating a shift in Paul's thought from his previous exhortations to the people to this prayer *for* the people.

The main verb ἀγιάσαι is in the aorist optative, expressing a wish or prayer. The optative mood is fairly rare in the New Testament, Out of 34,280 verbs, there are only 68 instances of the optative mood. Optatives are often rendered by the English word **may** or **might** *such-and-such happen*.

ὁ θεὸς God is nominative case, and so is the subject of the sentence. αὐτὸς adds emphasis: *God himself*. τῆς εἰρήνης is a standard use of the genitive, to express the English *of*. In this context, it is expressing that an essential aspect of the character of God is that it is characterized by peace.

So then αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἀγιάσαι is *May the God of peace himself make you holy*.

We have just had a number of commands from Paul. Holiness is something that the Thessalonian Believers need to strive for, and exercise their wills to become. At the same time, it is something that God himself takes initiative to produce in the lives of his people. Both of these things are true.

There is an elegant wordplay in German that is applicable here. Holiness is both *Gabe und Aufgabe*. It is both *gift* and *task*.

ὑμᾶς *you* is accusative, as it is the direct object of the verb ἀγιάσαι *may (God) make you holy*. The word ὁλοτελεῖς, which occurs only here in the NT, is an adjective modifying the accusative plural ὑμᾶς. Hence, it is also in the accusative plural. *May God make you completely/thoroughly holy*.

It is interesting that Paul wrote the verb ἀγιάζω in its aorist form. Based on our observations of how biblical writers used the aorist, it suggests that Paul was thinking of a decisive or complete action rather than an ongoing process.

For us, the task of becoming holy is certainly a process. By using the aorist, Paul may have been alluding to the Day of the Lord, when God will complete the process of making us holy, and free us forever from sin and the consequences of Fall.

The next phrase is a long one, with the optative verb at the very end. ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα...τηρηθείη *may your spirit, mind and body be guarded/preserved/kept*. All three nouns, τὸ πνεῦμα, ἡ ψυχὴ, and τὸ σῶμα, are in the nominative case, as indicated by their definite articles, τὸ, ἡ, and τὸ, plus their own endings. They function together as the compound subject of the passive optative verb τηρηθείη (may be preserved).

There is quite a bit of overlap between the spirit and the soul of a person. Assuming Paul did not intend a simple redundancy, and since he appears to be talking about the whole being of a person, the PB treats ἡ ψυχὴ as being *the mind*.¹

ὑμῶν *of you* functions to indicate possession. Paul is making his prayer for *your spirit, mind and body*.

The direct object of the verb is an accusative adjective ὁλόκληρον *whole, complete, perfect*. The phrase also contains an adverb that means almost the same thing: ἀμέμπως *blameless*. It is awkward trying to translate both the adjective and the adverb. NET Bible solves this by combining the two words into a single concept: *May your spirit and soul and body be kept entirely blameless*. PB treats both words as though they were adjectives, *whole and blameless*., modifying spirit/mind/body.

ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ *at the return of our Lord Jesus Christ*. ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ is a prepositional phrase where ἐν is followed by a dative article and noun. παρουσία is the word used by Jesus' disciples and by Jesus himself to refer to his return, in Matthew 24:3, 27, 37 and 39. τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is a full title, with the genitive performing a standard genitive-task

¹ LSJ ψυχὴ, s.v. definition IV.4

which we capture with the English phrase *of the Lord Jesus Christ*. ἡμῶν *our* is also genitive, indicating possession.

ἐν is an exceptionally versatile preposition. It can be translated in several ways into English. Some versions¹ render the phrase ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ as *at the return* of Jesus. This sees the primary work of sanctification occurring at the moment that Jesus returns, at the Day of the Lord.

Given that the rest of the phrase talks about God's work in the Believer's spirit, mind and body, other translations render ἐν as *until*.² This approach visualizes God's work of sanctification as being ongoing, in present time, and continuing until Jesus returns.

You as a translator must make a decision based on the grammar, immediate context, and context of the rest of the New Testament as to how to render this in your own version.

5:24

The one who calls you is faithful and will do it!

This is an enormously reassuring and encouraging verse. We are called to say *No* to sexual immorality. We are called to work diligently, and to be known as reliable people. In a word, we are called to be holy. This is a daunting task, and one that we may despair of ever achieving.

But the task of keeping us ready for the return of Jesus is not one that we do on our own. God himself is faithful, and can depend on him to bring us across the finish line.

πιστὸς ὁ καλῶν ὑμᾶς *The one who calls you is faithful*. The nominative article ὁ turns the participle derived from καλέω *to call* into a noun: the one who calls. While the participle is doing duty as a noun, it retains some verb-like qualities, and can take the accusative ὑμᾶς *you* as a direct object.

¹ Including the GNT, NET and NIV.

² PB, Phillips, NLT and CEV.

We have an equative-nominative construction here, ὁ καλῶν ≈ πιστὸς. The be-verb implied rather than stated. *The one-who-calls you (is) dependable / faithful / reliable / trustworthy.*

ὃς καὶ ποιήσει *and who will do.* ὃς is called a *relative pronoun*. It introduces a *relative clause*. A relative clause connects to, and modifies a noun or pronoun in the main clause. In this case, ὃς points back to ὁ καλῶν ὑμᾶς *the one who called you*, and gives us more information about this individual.

The most common relative pronouns are ὃς *who, that* and ὅστις *whoever, whichever, anyone who*. Relative pronouns agree with their antecedents in gender and number, but not necessarily in case. The case of the relative pronoun is determined by its grammatical function within its own clause, not by the noun in the main clause (which is called the *antecedent*).

In this case, ὃς is nominative, because it is the subject of the verb ποιήσει.

An example of a relative pronoun in the genitive case would be Matt. 1:16 Ἰακώβ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας, **ἐξ ἧς** ἐγεννήθη Ἰησοῦ *Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary, **by whom** was born Jesus. ἧς.*

ἐξ/ἐκ is always followed by a genitive, as ἧς is. It is feminine singular because it is referring back to Μαρίας, a name which is feminine and singular.

Here in 1 Thess 5:24, *and who will do* is inadequate as a translation into proper English. *And he will do it* or *and God will make this happen* are much better. J.B. Phillips' version uses more words, but very much communicates the spirit of what Paul was saying: *He who calls you is utterly faithful and he will finish what he has set out to do.*

5:25

Brothers and sisters, pray for us too.

Ἀδελφοί, προσεύχεσθε περὶ ἡμῶν *Brothers and sister, pray for us.*

If you have been translating your way through 1 Thessalonians, there is not much new to say about this verse. It uses the generic masculine, so the best rendering of Ἀδελφοί is *brothers and sisters*.

As you look at the word ending of προσεύχεσθε, you are unsurprised that it is the 2nd person present middle imperative plural form of προσεύχομαι, a middle voice verb that lacks an —ω form.

When περὶ is followed by a genitive, as it is here, we render it as *about*, *concerning*, *for*.

Paul clearly believed that *prayer does stuff*. It is different from simple meditation. God is the person at the other end of the phone, so to speak, and he responds to prayer. So praying is something we *can* and *ought to* do for each other.

In fact, there are indications that God gets *peevd* with us if we do NOT pray. The GNT version of Zeph. 3:1 says, *Jerusalem is doomed, that corrupt, rebellious city....It has not put its trust in the Lord or asked for his help.*

I normally think it is some sort of amazing thing that the creator of the whole universe would listen to my prayer at all. But in fact, God is so eager for me to ask for his help, that he gets *angry* if I don't do it.

5:26

Greet all of our brothers and sisters there with a warm handshake.

ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἀδελφούς πάντας *Greet all our brothers and sisters*. Once again, this verse contains familiar word forms and grammar. τοὺς ἀδελφούς is accusative plural, as the direct object of the verb *Greet*. The article τοὺς is was an enormously versatile tool for NT writers. It is often left untranslated, is sometimes translated as *the*, and in a context such as this, should be translated with the possessive *our*.

πάντας *all* is an adjective that agrees in number, gender, and case with ἀδελφούς, giving us more information about the brothers (and sisters)—namely, that Paul is talking about ALL of them.

ἀσπάσασθε has the familiar —ασθε ending for the 2nd person plural aorist imperative for a verb that ends in —ομαι. We are unsurprised to see that the dictionary form of this verb is ἀσπάζομαι.

ἐν φιλήματι ἁγίῳ *with a holy kiss*. The preposition ἐν is always followed by a dative, so that is the form that φιλήματι a kiss takes—a dative singular neuter.

ἅγιω is an adjective, which agrees with the noun it modifies,¹ that tells what sort of kiss it is to be: a *holy* kiss.

The practical application of this verse is a bit difficult in a North American context. If you visit a new church, and give the people you meet there a kiss, it is not likely to go well for you.

There is no hint in first century writings that the Canadian handshake was ever used. But even a hug is culturally-inappropriate in many settings.

I remember once seeing a Christian woman I knew, and I came up behind her and gave her a hug—except it was not who I thought it was. It was a woman I did not know at all. I said, *I'm sorry, I thought you were somebody else*. She said, *Who did you think I was?* At this point my memory failed to work. Of course, anybody with an ability to improvise would have made up an answer. But all I could do was to stammer and say, *I can't remember who I thought you were*.

The point is that if a hug can sometimes misfire, a kiss would be worse. If the goal for our own translations is to leave our readers (1) unaware that they *are* reading a translation, and (2) responding to this epistle the way the *first* readers of it responded, then the word-for-word translation *Greet all of the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss* is going to fail.

There are, however, dozens of published English versions that disagree with me on this.²

So you can go ahead with a *holy kiss* in your own translation, secure in the knowledge that (1) you have hundreds of Bible scholars who *agree* with your rendering, while knowing that you are taking the risk that (2) *none* of your readers are going to get the point of this verse.

5:27

I solemnly entrust you, in the name of the Lord, with the responsibility of reading this letter to all the brothers and sisters.

The shift to the first person singular in the verb ἐννοκίζω *I adjure*) is unexpected, but probably means that Paul took over writing the letter from

¹ So it is also dative singular neuter.

² CEV and Phillips alone recognize the same translation issue that I do.

the scribe to whom he had been dictating.... This corresponds to 2 Thes. 3:17, where Paul tells his readers that it is his practice to write the final greetings in his own hand as a sign of authenticity. The original readers would of course have immediately noted the change in handwriting, if this suggestion is correct, and would presumably have recognized it as Paul's since elsewhere the apostle seems to imply that his script was unusual (Gal. 6:11).¹

ἐνορκίζω ὑμᾶς τὸν κύριον *I charge you in the Lord*. The accusative ὑμᾶς is the direct object of the verb ἐνορκίζω, as we would expect. τὸν κύριον seems a bit odd to us. We would expect *in the Lord* to be expressed by a dative rather than an accusative. However, the verb ἐνορκίζω has courtroom connotations, and it was common that the authority by which a command was given would be expressed in the accusative case.

ἀναγνωσθῆναι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς *to be read this letter to all the brothers and sisters*. The PB takes advantage of the flexibility that the Greek article ὁ enjoyed to render τὴν ἐπιστολὴν as **this** letter rather than **the** letter.

Given the forceful way that Paul starts this verse, we would rather expect the Greek to be expressed in the form of *this letter should be read* or *must be read*. The most natural way to express this would be with δεῖ *it is necessary* + infinitive + accusative object.

What we have in verse 27 is the infinitive + accusative object. It rather seems from the context that Paul would be implying the δεῖ. In any case, the PB is translated as though the δεῖ was indeed present.

τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς is the indirect object of the verb, and is naturally rendered—with ἀδελφοῖς being understood as a generic masculine that includes both the brothers *and* the sisters—into English as *to the brothers and sisters*. πᾶσιν is the dative plural of the adjective πᾶς, which agrees with and modifies ἀδελφοῖς so as to be understood as **all** of the brothers and sisters.

Just why Paul would be so forceful in commanding that his letter be read to all and sundry is a bit mysterious. This is the only instance of such a command in his letters.

¹ Wanamaker, op. cit., 208.

However, we might keep in mind that this was only the second letter Paul had written to a church—Galatians being the first. It could be that Paul himself felt that what he wrote here came with the delegated authority of Jesus himself, but he was not sure that the Thessalonians would understand this to be so by default. He felt he needed to encourage them to read this letter to the whole congregation.

However, it seems that not long would pass before each of Paul's letters was acknowledged by churches throughout the Mediterranean area as being authoritative—a word from the Lord. As soon as a church received a letter from Paul, copies were made and enthusiastically shared with other nearby congregations. There was no further need to command people to read his letters.

I could wish that Luke, when he was writing the book of Acts, had included a bit more detail about the process by which Paul's letters were disseminated. Did eight people get together in the evenings for a week, with one person reading the letter aloud and the other seven writing out copies to send to other churches?

Writing on parchment was an expensive proposition, since making parchment was such an exacting process. The hide of a calf, goat, or sheep was chemically treated,¹ stretched onto a frame, then scraped on both sides with a sharp knife.² Papyrus was cheaper and less durable than parchment, but could only be purchased from Egypt.

But as the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to write, he clearly felt that satisfying Bob's curiosity was a pretty low priority, alas!

5:28

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

¹ We know that by the 8th century, calcium hydroxide (slaked lime) was being used. We are not entirely sure what the process was in the 1st century. But we know that durable parchment was being made. We today can still read Codex Sinaiticus,

which was written on parchment around A.D. 330.

² *The Manufacture of Parchment*, <https://pergament.ee/interesting-facts-about-parchment/the-manufacture-of-parchment/> goes into a good bit more detail. I found this fascinating reading.

ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μεθ' ὑμῶν *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (be) with you.* In the NT, the verb is always expressed in sentences, with the exception of the be-verb. It was often left implied, as it is here.

ἡ χάρις is nominative case, as the subject of the benediction. τοῦ κυρίου is expressing the most common function of the genitive—to capture what we do in English with the word *of*. Every word in that phrase τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ *of our Lord Jesus Christ* is also genitive, to agree with the genitive κυρίου.

The final word in the verse ὑμῶν is also genitive, but for a different reason. It is part of a prepositional phrase μεθ' ὑμῶν *with you*. This is, of course, μετὰ ὑμῶν, where the —ὰ of μετὰ is dropped because the next word starts with a vowel. Then the τ becomes θ because the word following starts with a rough breathing mark.

Paul ends the letter as he begins it in 1:1, with the wish that God's grace would be fully experienced by the Believers in Thessalonica.¹

¹ Once you begin to notice chiasm, you start seeing it everywhere. In this letter, the Paul's wish and prayer for God's grace for

the Thessalonians is like a pair of bookends for the letter.

Translation Helps

If one attempts to translate portions of the New Testament, there are some issues that come up again and again. Rather than attempting to always deal with them comprehensively in the body of the commentary, I will look at some of those issues here.

Flashcards

For those of you who benefit memorizing vocabulary using flashcards, I have done an analysis of this book that you can use before you go too deeply into translation.

If you have never used flashcards before, just go to an office supply store and buy a pack of 3 inch by 5 inch index cards. Put a word on the front of a card as it appears in the text of 1 Thess. and put the lemma, analysis, and definition on the other side.

There are 572 distinct word forms in the Greek of 1 Thessalonians (if τὰ and τῷ are considered two separate words, even though they are both forms of ὁ). 478 of these are used only once or twice. Memorizing all of these would be a lot of work for not much return.

On the other hand, memorizing just **48** words will let you sight-read 50.3% of the text in 1 Thessalonians. That is an achievable goal that will deliver significant benefits to you. Here are the 48 words that are used 6 or more times in 1 Thessalonians.

Text	Lemma	Analysis	Definition	Frequency
καί	καί	conjunction	and, even, also	82
ἐν	ἐν	preposition	in, by, with	53
ὁμᾶς	σύ	personal pronoun, accusative plural	you (object)	33
ἡμῶν	ἐγώ	personal pronoun, genitive plural	of us, our	31
τοῦ	ὁ	definite article, genitive singular masculine	the	28

ὕμῶν	σύ	personal pronoun, genitive plural	of you, your	27
εἰς	εἰς	preposition	into, to, for	26
τό	ὁ	definite article, accusative singular neuter	the	24
γάρ	γάρ	conjunction	for, because	23
καί	καί	adverb	also, even	18
οὐ	οὐ	adverb	not	18
ὁ	ὁ	definite article, nominative singular masculine	the	16
θεοῦ	θεός	noun, genitive singular masculine	of God	16
τόν	ὁ	definite article, accusative singular masculine	the	15
δέ	δέ	conjunction	but, and, now	15
ὑμῖν	σύ	personal pronoun, dative plural	to/for you	14
ἀδελφοί	ἀδελφός	noun, vocative plural masculine	brothers	14
τῇ	ὁ	definite article, dative singular feminine	the	13
κυρίου	κύριος	noun, genitive singular masculine	of the Lord	13
ὑπό	ὑπό	preposition	by, under	13
μή	μή	adverb	not	13
ἀλλά	ἀλλά	conjunction	but, rather	13
καθώς	καθώς	conjunction	just as, according as	13
πρός	πρός	preposition	to, toward, with	13
ὅτι	ὅτι	conjunction	that, because	12
τῆς	ὁ	definite article, genitive singular feminine	the	12
τήν	ὁ	definite article, accusative singular feminine	the	10
τούς	ὁ	definite article, accusative plural masculine	the	10
οἱ	ὁ	definite article, nominative plural masculine	the	10
διά	διά	preposition	through, by means of	10
ἡ	ὁ	definite article, nominative singular feminine	the	10
ὑμεῖς	σύ	personal pronoun, nominative plural	you (subject)	10
τῶν	ὁ	definite article, genitive plural masculine	the	10
ἡμᾶς	ἐγώ	personal pronoun, accusative plural	us (object)	9

θεῶ	θεός	noun, dative singular masculine	to/for God	9
οἴδατε	οἶδα	verb, 2nd person perfect active indicative plural	you know	9
περί	περί	preposition	about, concerning	9
Ἰησοῦ	Ἰησοῦς	noun, genitive singular masculine	of Jesus	8
ὥς	ὥς	conjunction	as, like, how	8
ἡμεῖς	ἐγώ	personal pronoun, nominative plural	we (subject)	7
θεός	θεός	noun, nominative singular masculine	God	7
ἵνα	ἵνα	conjunction	in order that, so that	7
Χριστοῦ	Χριστός	noun, genitive singular masculine	of Christ	6
πάντοτε	πάντοτε	adverb	always	6
ἐπί	ἐπί	preposition	on, upon, over	6
αὐτοί	αὐτός	personal pronoun, nominative plural masculine	they, themselves	6
ἐκ	ἐκ	preposition	from, out of	6

ἀγαπάω in 1 Thess.

Together, the verb and noun forms of *love* (ἀγαπάω and ἀγάπη) are used five times in 1 Thessalonians. It is worth drilling down on this concept to see what Paul had in mind. Rather than approach this question directly from 1 Thessalonians, I will use John 21, where a second verb for *to love*, φιλέω, is used. This makes it possible for us to look for contrasting meanings.

The Issue

As we see the alternating use of ἀγαπάω and φιλέω in John 21, it is natural to ask if different shadings of meaning were intended.

15) When, then, they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you **love (ἀγαπάω)** me more than these others do?" Peter replied, "Yes, Lord. You know that I **love (φιλέω)** you." Jesus said back to him, "Feed my lambs."

16) Jesus then asked him a second time, "Simon son of John, do you **love (ἀγαπάω)** me." Peter replied, "Yes, Lord, you know that I **love (φιλέω)** you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The Complete Jewish Bible believes that there are different shades of meaning, and translates part of verse 15 as *Do you love me?* He replied, *Yes, Lord, you know I'm your friend.*

While we don't know exactly what Jesus' words were in Aramaic, the translators of the New Testament into Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic, very similar to the Palestinian Aramaic¹ that Jesus spoke) used only one word,

[illegible]

Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, and Augustine, all of whom were native Greek speakers, each discussed John 21, and none of them alluded to any significant difference between these verbs.

The translators of the first versions of the New Testament in Latin, like the translators of the Syriac version, used a single word to render both ἀγαπάω and φιλέω in this passage.³

ܐܝܣܡ and ܐܝܝܡ represent the same Aramaic word, pronounced identically; just notated with different alphabets.

3 Cum ergo prandidissent dicit simoni petro
ihs simon iohannis **amas** diligis me dicit ei
etia dne tu scis quia **amo** te dicit ei pascere
agnos meos.

It was not until the 19th century that the idea took hold that ἀγαπάω and φιλέω were intended to connote different things in this passage.

ἀγαπάω and φιλέω Elsewhere in John

John seems to use these words interchangeably. Both terms are used of God's love for man.

3:16 For this is the way God **loved (ἀγαπάω)** the people of the world: he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who trusts in him will not die but have eternal life.

16:27 The Father himself **loves (φιλέω)** you, for you have loved me and believed that I came God.

Both words are used in reference to the Father's love for the Son.

3:35 The Father **loves (ἀγαπάω)** the Son, and has given him authority over everything.

5:20 For the Father **loves (φιλέω)** the Son, and shows him everything he is doing, and he will show him even greater works than these. You are going to be amazed.

Both are used of Jesus' love for people.

11:3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus and said, "Lord, the one you **love (φιλέω)** is sick."

11:5 Jesus **loved (ἀγαπάω)** Martha, her sister, and Lazarus.

So too of the love of people for other people.

13:34 I am giving you a new commandment: **love (ἀγαπάω)** each other, just as I have loved you. Again I say, love each other.

15:19 If you were at home in this world, the world would **love (φιλέω)** you back. But you are not really 'of this world', for I have chosen you to come out of the world, and the world hates you for that reason.

Finally, John used both of these words to describe the love of people for Jesus.

8:42 Jesus said to them, "If God was your Father, you would **love (ἀγαπάω)** me. For I am come from God and I am here now. I did not come on my own accord, but he sent me.

16:27 The Father himself **loves (φιλέω)** you, for you have **loved (φιλέω)** me and believed that I came God.

“The third time”

If the words ἀγαπάω and φιλέω differed in meaning, it seems unlikely that John would have ever said that Peter's feelings were hurt that Jesus had asked the third time, *Do you love me?* in verse 17. For Jesus did not use the same words three times in a row. He asked:

- Verse 15 Do you ἀγαπάω me?
- Verse 16 Do you ἀγαπάω me?
- Verse 17 Do you φιλέω me?

In Peter's answer there is no sense of any discrepancy between the kind of love demanded and the love felt. It comes with a ναί, Κύριε.

John seemed to write his gospel with the understanding that these two words were interchangeable.

C.S. Lewis

Lewis wrote an enormously popular and influential book in 1958, called *The Four Loves*. In it, he talks of four different Greek words for love.¹

στοργή the instinctive love that parents and children have for each other.

ἔρως romantic love (although we get our word "erotic" from ἔρως, this is not the same as πόρνος, from which we get our word for pornography).

¹ Lewis talks only about the noun forms of these words, but they all have verb equivalents, of course. ἀγάπη/ἀγαπάω, ἔρως/ἐράω, etc. Neither στοργή nor ἔρως (nor their verb-

equivalents) occur in the New Testament. However, what Lewis says about these words is still interesting.

φιλία

the strong love between deep friends.

ἀγάπη

the greatest of the four loves: selfless love, the love that exists regardless of changing circumstances, the kind of love that God himself shows.

This is great, isn't it? Thought-provoking. Profound. Preachers have loved this book for the last 65 years. The only problem is that, when you start reading the Bible for yourself rather than reading what other people SAY about the Bible, it is not precisely *true*.¹

Luke 11:43 Woe to you, Pharisees, for you **love (ἀγαπάω)** the best seats in the synagogues and to be recognized in the marketplace.

John 3:19 This is the basis for judgement—that the light has come into the universe and people **loved (ἀγαπάω)** darkness, preferring it to the light, because their deeds were evil.

John 12:43 For they **loved (ἀγαπάω)** a good reputation with men more than a good reputation with God.

2 Tim. 4:10 For Demas abandoned me, since he **loved (ἀγαπάω)** this material world, and went to Thessalonica. Crescens went to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia.

Astute Bible teachers will not try to be too inflexible in attributing a fixed theological baggage to the word *agape* when the godless, self-centered love of the Pharisees is also called *agape* love.

¹ As a general rule, if C.S. Lewis says one thing, and Bob Goethe says another, you should definitely believe C.S. Lewis. But in this case, it is worth noting that a significant number of evangelical scholars see ἀγαπάω and φιλέω in John 21 as being synonymous/interchangeable, including C.K. Barrett, G.R. Beasley-Murray, D.A. Carson, and F.F. Bruce.

We can see that the 1984 edition of the NIV was trying to capture a difference between ἀγαπάω and φιλέω when they translated verse 16 as: *Again Jesus said,*

*“Simon son of John, do you **truly love** me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I **love** you....”*

However, by the time of the 2011 edition, the translators had concluded that the two words were interchangeable. They reveal this by using a single English word only to translate both Greek words.

*Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you **love** me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I **love** you....”*

So it is not just Bob who is disagreeing with C.S. Lewis.

Further, don't start with a sermon, or even C.S. Lewis' book, and work backwards into the Bible. Rather, start with the text of Scripture, learn what you can, and THEN go to C.S. Lewis to see if he has any further insights.

And he does indeed have inspiring insights...even if he is not quite correct in his analysis of word usage in the NT.

The other thing is that, according to Moisés Silva, *Theology*, op. cit., 113, φιλέω was a hugely common word for love during the *Classical Greek* period in the language, around 450 BC. But during the *Koine* period, in the first century AD, φιλέω was being used less commonly by Greek speakers everywhere.¹

That being the case, it is perhaps no surprise that forms of ἀγαπάω are used in the NT 143 times, while forms of φιλέω are used only 25 times.

John and Wordplay

John's writing style seems to be characterized by wordplay—by a tendency to vary his vocabulary without intending a significant difference in meaning. In chapter 21, we see:

- ἀρνίον (*sheep, lamb*) in v. 15, but πρόβατον (*sheep*) in vv. 16–17.
- βόσκω (*to tend, graze, feed*) in 21:15, 17, but ποιμαίνω (*to herd, tend, shepherd*) in v. 16.
- οἶδα (*to know*) in vv. 15–17a, but γινώσκω (*also to know*) in v. 17b.
- three different words for *fish* used in vv. 5–13: προσφάγιον, ἰχθύς, and ὀψάριον.

While these words (like virtually all synonyms in any language) are distinguishable in some contexts, from my reading of this passage it seems unlikely that John here intends to differentiate between two distinct types of people with the first pair of terms and between two distinct types of ministry with the second pair. Nor is he somehow talking about three different types of fish.

Rather, I think we are in a position—even at our current level of fluency in Koine Greek—to be able to say something about John's writing style: he

¹ This is not unlike the way that *thee/thou/thine* are still used in 21st century English, but are a good bit less common

than they were 400 years ago, during Shakespeare's time.

loves to use synonyms, even when the conversations he was translating from Aramaic may have used a single word only.¹

Conclusion

The classic use of *word studies* is to discover subtle differences between words—to unpack the shades of meaning that distinguish them.

In this case, however, a comprehensive investigation of ἀγαπάω and φιλέω in the New Testament, and in the Gospel of John particularly, reveals no subtle differences. Rather, ***the words are used interchangeably***. The most likely conclusion is that Jesus/John varied the words they used for love to make the Greek less repetitive and more readable.

Biblical writers depend on the **context** to tell us whether ἀγαπάω is a good thing...

*For this is the way God **loved** the people of the world: he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who trusts in him will not die but have eternal life.*

...or a bad thing:

*For Demas abandoned me, since he **loved** this material world....*

Woe to you, Pharisees, for you love the best seats in the synagogues and to be recognized in the marketplace.

So also with φιλέω.

Why, then, was Peter feeling hurt in John 21? John himself TELLS us exactly why: he was hurt “*because he said to him a third time, do you love me?*” Probably, he asked Peter this question three times as a way of reminding Peter of his three denials of Jesus. He gives Peter three chances to reaffirm his love.

¹ While this is definitely true of John, it *may* be *also* true of other biblical authors/translators. *I love* (ἀγαπάω) *those who love* (φιλέω) *me* (Prov 8:17 LXX, where the two terms render the same Hebrew verb, אָהַב). If we ever get to the place

where simply translating the Bible becomes too easy, we can continue to challenge ourselves by attempting to characterize the writing styles of various biblical authors.

To circle back to 1 Thessalonians, you will determine the content of Paul's use of love by looking at the context.

If Only You Could Read This in the Original Greek

...is a phrase that should never pass your lips.

Once while I was working on my Master of Divinity degree, a fellow student came to me, concerned, and asked, *Am I doomed to miss out on God's best for me because I don't read Greek?* I reassured him that this was not at all a danger, because of who God is and how he has elected to use Scripture in our lives.

The Holy Spirit inspired the four Gospels to be written, FROM DAY ONE, *in translation!* All the clues we have suggest that the language that was spoken on the street in first century Palestine was Aramaic—the language that the people first learned when exiled in Babylon, which was continued even after the Persians allowed the Jews to return to Israel.¹ For instance:

- Mark 5:41 *Then, gently taking the child by the hand, he said to her, "Talitha koum," which is Aramaic for, "Little girl, I say to you, get up."*
- Mk. 7:34 *Then he looked up to heaven and said with a sigh, "Ephphatha", which is Aramaic for "Be opened."*
- Matt. 27:46 *At about three o'clock Jesus shouted with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which is Aramaic for, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

These three instances are places where the NT author felt we could not get the whole flavor of what Jesus said unless, so to speak, we heard it *in the original Aramaic*. But with the exception of these and just a few more instances, we got the words of Jesus translated into Greek.

¹ Even after the return to Palestine, Aramaic would have been spoken. Not only was it the language most people had been speaking in Babylon, but after the Persians conquered Babylon, they chose to keep Aramaic as the official language of their empire, which included Palestine.

Israel's experience here was not unlike that of immigrants to Canada. First generation immigrants continue to speak the language of *the old country*. Their

children *understand* the language of the old country, since it was spoken in their homes growing up, but the language they are most comfortable *speaking* is English.

In the third generation, even the ability to *understand* the language of the old country is lost.

Israel was in exile for long enough for Aramaic to become the language of young people, rather than Hebrew.

And yet, although we read the words of Jesus in translation, we still hear the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to us. We find that the genuine, written Word of God soaks into the deepest recesses of our hearts.

We have a bit of a paradox, then. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit gives us God's very best while we read the Bible in translation. And yet, we often have insights while translating from Greek that are brand new to us.

As with so many biblical paradoxes, I believe we resolve this with several action steps. First, we do nothing to undermine people's confidence in the Bible version they are using. We do not suggest that the Holy Spirit would speak to them more profoundly if only they could read Greek.

At the same time, we carry on with our Greek studies, and look for ways of sharing what we learn with others in the Body of Christ. But even as I do this myself, I try to do it without mentioning that the genesis of this or that insight came from my efforts in Greek translation.

Until I began actually instructing Greek during the Covid lockdown in 2022, virtually nobody other than my fellow MDiv. students knew that I could read Greek. I probably only mentioned it 4 or 5 times to anybody else over the space of 50 years.¹

Whenever I have an *Aha!* moment while translating Greek, I try to reverse engineer it so that whatever I learn can be derived from the English Bible. For example, it was only when I drilled down into the word ἀπορφανίζω in 2:17 that I thought about how deep were the emotions Paul felt was when he wrote to the Thessalonians.

However, while apparently using only the English Bible, I could still talk about the bond that the Thessalonian believers and Paul had with each other by drawing people's attention to how Paul described himself as feeling like a mother (2:7), like a father (2:11). And Paul says in 2:17 that the way you would

¹ I do recall once where I was having a discussion with some Mormon missionaries. They kept saying that the Bible was *the Word of God insofar as it is translated correctly*.

As we went about in circles, I got exasperated, took my Greek NT out of my

bag, slammed it on the table, and said, *OK. Show me the passages you think are translated wrong. Let's unpack them together.*

This, of course, was a futile move on my part, and only illustrated that you can win the argument without actually winning the person.

feel if you were compelled to suddenly abandon your children is just the way he felt when he was compelled to suddenly abandon them.

This way, I am giving people the benefit of what I discover in my Greek study, but doing so in a way that does not undermine their confidence in the NIV Bible they use every day. Further, I am modelling for them a sort of close reading of the text that they can do for themselves, in English.

The final reason for avoiding sharing about my Greek knowledge with others is that doing so could potentially lead *me* to an inappropriate pride in my abilities—to a subtle boasting (*When I was reading in my Greek NT yesterday, I had this amazing insight....*) that could give the Devil a foothold in my life.

Translating Difficult and Obsolete Words

In the body of the commentary, I have discussed the challenge of translating Greek words that have an English equivalent which is only likely to be understood by regular church attenders.¹

In the Polar Bear version, I have attempted to find equivalents from mainstream, 21st century Canadian English. So in the gospels, I have experimented with rendering οἱ μαθηταί *the disciples* as *the men Jesus was mentoring* or sometimes as *Jesus' mentees*. In the same way, I have rendered τὰ ἔθνη the Gentiles as *the unconverted*, *the pagans*, *other ethnic groups*, or *various people groups*, depending on the context.

This is problematic in that the wording of some of my verses becomes awkward. And with respect to the word Φαρισαῖος *Pharisee*, the English language simply does not contain another equivalent word.

There is no easy solution here. Making what the New Testament authors wrote—which was easily understood by their original readers—comprehensible to modern readers is the challenge you take on as a translator. However, there is one solution to this problem that has been effectively employed by the Good News Translation: to include a glossary.

Whenever the GNT uses a word that is uncommon, but for which no other English equivalent is available, or which presumes significant knowledge of the

¹ Refer back to 2:16

original cultural setting, they include it in the word list at the back of the volume.

WORD LIST

This Word List identifies many objects or cultural features whose meaning may not be known to all readers.

Abib The first month of the Hebrew calendar, corresponding to the period from about mid-March to about mid-April. This month is also called Nisan.

Abyss The place in the depths of the earth where the demons were imprisoned until their final punishment.

Acacia A flowering tree, a type of mimosa, with hard and durable wood.

Adar The twelfth month of the Hebrew calendar, corresponding to the period from about mid-February to about mid-March.

Agate A semiprecious stone of various colors, but usually white and brown.

Alabaster A soft stone of usually light

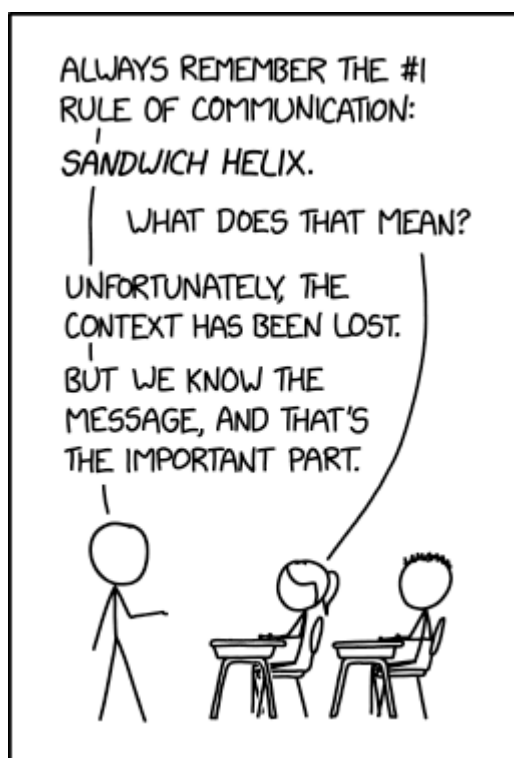
fer to Paul and other Christian workers. The word may have the sense of "messenger."

Areopagus A hill in Athens where the city council used to meet. For this reason the council itself was called Areopagus, even after it no longer met on the hill.

Artemis The Greek name of an ancient goddess of fertility, worshiped especially in Asia Minor.

Asherah A goddess of fertility worshiped by the Canaanites; her male counterpart was Baal. After the Hebrews invaded Canaan, many of them began worshiping these two gods.

Word Studies and Context



<https://xkcd.com/3003/>, used by permission.¹

This comic illustrates a key principle in biblical interpretation. *The paragraph, rather than the individual word or even the sentence, is the fundamental unit of meaning in the Bible.*

While individual words are important, their actual meaning often only starts to come into focus when used in a sentence.

And beyond this, sentences form coherent thoughts in paragraphs: Paragraphs group related sentences together, forming a complete idea or argument.²

In fact, in both Greek and English, there are words that can take opposite meanings depending on the context. Take the verb *to dust*.

¹ <https://xkcd.com/license.html>

² In 2:20, we see this principle in action, as the word δόξα requires a different translation than it does in 2:12.

It can mean to *apply* an almost microscopic powdered substance to something, as in *I dusted the cake with icing sugar*.

It can also mean to *remove* an almost microscopic powdered substance from something, as in *I dusted the coffee table*. Because of the context differences, native English speakers never misunderstand this verb.

It is the sentence, at least, that gives words meaning. Without a sentence, the words *sandwich helix* in the comic above are just so much gibberish.¹

Linguists say that the paragraph which wraps around a word *disambiguates* the word. For example, the word "bank" could refer to a financial institution or the edge of a river. It is the context that clarifies which meaning is appropriate.

It is convenient to discuss translation issues on a verse-by-verse basis. But when you share your translation with others, it will be good to follow the example of (close to) 100% of the published Bible versions, and arrange your verses into paragraphs.²

¹ And one could imagine that if these words DID have a meaning, it would take more than one sentence to unpack that meaning. It might take even more than a paragraph. It might require an entire Wikipedia article.

² It was the King James Version, with each verse beginning on a fresh line, that trained us, so to speak, to ignore context at the level of the paragraph. There *were* no paragraphs.

<p>Mark 3 ∨ Good News Translation ∨</p> <p>The Man with a Paralyzed Hand</p> <p>3 Then Jesus went back to the synagogue, where there was a man who had a paralyzed hand. 2 Some people were there who wanted to accuse Jesus of doing wrong; so they watched him closely to see whether he would cure the man on the Sabbath. 3 Jesus said to the man, "Come up here to the front." 4 Then he asked the people, "What does our Law allow us to do on the Sabbath? To help or to harm? To save someone's life or to destroy it?"</p> <p>But they did not say a thing. 5 Jesus was angry as he looked around at them, but at the same</p>	<p>Mark 3 ∨ New International Version ∨</p> <p>Jesus Heals on the Sabbath</p> <p>3 Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. 2 Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. 3 Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." 4 Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.</p> <p>5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the</p>	<p>Mark 3 ∨ New Living Translation ∨</p> <p>Jesus Heals on the Sabbath</p> <p>3 Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand. 2 Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath.</p> <p>3 Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone." 4 Then he turned to his critics and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?" But they wouldn't answer him.</p> <p>5 He looked around at them angrily</p>
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You can see that the translators of these three versions made different judgement calls on just where the paragraph breaks should come—but they have *all* arranged their verses into paragraphs, to help us comprehend the individual words.

So What Are We to Make of Word Studies?

This is an excellent question, and one that you may take the next five years to think about and answer. To get you started, here is are a pair of queries I addressed to Perplexity.AI Pro.



<https://www.perplexity.ai/search/give-me-a-bibliographic-citati-ABd9mTcaQV.kF54DH1yPGg#1>

Participles

Participles are the Swiss Army Knife of Koine Greek. Authors used them to perform many different tasks, which can make them challenging for us to translate.



Public Domain Photo

The Tense of Greek Participles

In English, we could say that verb tenses deal in absolute time. They tell us whether the action took place in the past or present, or if it is yet to come in the future.

For Greek participles, however, tense tells us about the timing of action *relative to the main verb* of the sentence. So then:

- Present participles usually indicate action occurring *at the same time* as the main verb. A present participle used with a past tense main verb would indicate simultaneous action in the past.
- Aorist participles often indicate action occurring *prior to* the main verb.
- Future participles indicates action that will occur *after* the main verb.
- Perfect participles typically indicate *a completed action with ongoing results at the time* of the main verb.

Common Uses of Participles

There are five broad categories of participle use in the NT.

First, they may be used like adjectives to modify nouns. ὁ λέγων ἄνθρωπος = *the speaking man*

Second, they may be used by an author like adverbs, functioning in several ways to modify verbs. These include:

- Time: ἐλθὼν εἶδεν = *after he arrived, he saw*
- Manner: κλαίων εἶπεν = *he spoke with tears in his eyes*
- Cause: γνόντες τὸν θεὸν = *because they knew God*
- Concession: καίπερ ὢν υἱός = *although being a son*¹

Third, participles complete the meaning of certain verbs. For instance, εἶδον αὐτὸν ἐρχόμενον = *I saw him coming*.

Fourth, when preceded by an article, participles may function as nouns. ὁ πιστεύων = *the one who believes*

Fifth, participles can function like main verbs, particularly where you have an aorist participle appearing ahead of an aorist main verb.

In English, we are happy to say He opened the door and went in. This involves two indicative verbs, *opened* and *went*, connected by an *and*.

Speakers of Koine Greek, however, preferred not to do this. Rather they liked to have a participle followed by an indicative verb, with no *and*. ἀνοίξας τὴν θύραν εἰσέβη is properly rendered into English as *He opened the door and went in*, even though *opened* is actually a participle.² So also in Luke 5:11, ἀφέντες πάντα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ. *They abandoned everything and followed him*.

¹ Concessive force is Greek-class jargon for expresses an idea like *although, even though, or despite*. It shows that one thing happened DESPITE something else that might normally prevent it. This is the usages in 1 Thess. 2:2.

² Greek-class jargon for this construction is that *the participle is one of attendant*

circumstance. Attendant means *accompanying or going along with something*. Circumstance refers to a condition or fact accompanying an event. So the term tries to capture how these participles express actions that *attend* (go along with) the main verb.

There can be overlap between these categories. Sometimes biblical writers intended to communicate something about time, and also to have the participle translated¹ as a main verb. There may be some of this overlap in 1 Thess 2:2.

My goal in Greek is to be able to keep a reader's edition of the Greek NT at the head of my bed, and read a chapter from it before going to sleep at night.

But when it comes to participles, I sometimes take the dog for a walk and spend 30 minutes thinking about the context of a single word, and pondering how the author intended his readers to understand it.

Greek Infinitives

In Koine Greek, infinitives typically play dependent roles in sentences. They often serve functions such as:

- Complementary infinitives (completing the idea of another verb). E.g., οὐδεὶς **δύναται** δυσὶ κυρίοις δουλεύειν. *No one can serve two masters* (Matthew 6:24).

A more wooden translation which is more transparent about the grammar could be *No one **is able** to serve two masters*, where the main verb is bold and the infinitive is underlined.

- Purpose infinitives. An example of this usage is in 1 Thess 1:9-10. You **turned** (the main verb) from idols. Why? *To serve* God, and *to wait* for the return of Jesus.

A purpose infinitive can also be expressed with an εἰς plus an article just before the infinitive. E.g., καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδοται εἰς τὸ σταυρωθῆναι. *And the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified* (Matthew 26:2).

- A function of infinitives that sometimes overlaps purpose infinitives is to express a result. E.g., καὶ ἐθεράπευσεν αὐτοὺς ὥστε τὸν ὄχλον θαυμάσαι. *And he healed them, so that the crowd marveled* (Matthew 15:31).

¹ It is anachronistic to talk about Paul would have wanted his words translated into

English. But perhaps you can get the drift of what I am trying to say here anyway.

This construction shows the outcome or consequence of Jesus healing the people - it resulted in the crowd marveling.

- It can express something about time, when preceded by an ἐν plus an article. E.g., ἐν τῷ λέγειν αὐτὸν ταῦτα...γυνή...εἶπεν. *While he was saying these things, a woman spoke.* (Luke 11:27).

Since the infinitive is giving us details about the main verb, we would say that this infinitive is functioning as an adverb.

- With an article, it can act like a noun. νυνὶ δὲ καὶ τὸ ποιῆσαι ἐπιτελέσατε. *Now finish the work* (2 Corinthians 8:11, NIV).

The case of the article can give you a tip off for how the author intended the the infinitive to function in the sentence. In the case of 2 Cor. 8:11, where the article is in the accusative case, the infinitive is acting like a noun in the role of a direct object.

The neuter article nominative and accusative are formed identically: τό. As you inspect the context of a sentence, it may become apparent to you that the author meant a given infinitive to function as the subject of the sentence. E.g., τὸ δὲ ἀνίπτους χερσὶν φαγεῖν οὐ κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον. *But eating with unwashed hands does not make a man 'sinful'* (Matthew 15:20).

In this example, *eating* is a verbal noun. We do the same thing when we turn the verb *flying* into a noun. E.g., *Flying is a delightful experience.*

So, while it's generally safe to expect infinitives to play dependent roles in Koine Greek, it's not an absolute rule. Context and usage are always key in determining the exact function of an infinitive in any given sentence.

WWLLS

The classic case of producing a *translation* that nobody understands is Luke 14:2 in the ESV. *And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy.*

The first problem is with the word *Behold*. While not altogether unintelligible, this is not a word that is used in Canadian Standard English. In coaching my Greek students, I always ask them to consider WWLLS, *What would Lisa LaFlamme say?*

Lisa LaFlamme is a renowned Canadian journalist, and was a long-time anchor of the CTV national news broadcast. Network news anchorpeople exemplify (and to some extent, help to define) what constitutes *Canadian Standard English*.¹

I tell my students that if they can never imagine Lisa LaFlamme saying, *And behold, there was a train wreck today in Quebec*, then they may not use the word *Behold* in their translations.

The second, and far more significant issue with how the ESV handles this verse is with the word *dropsy*.

Dropsy was once a word used in professional medical literature. An influential work using the word was William Withering, *An Account of the Foxglove, and Some of Its Medical Uses: With Practical Remarks on Dropsy and Other Diseases* (1785).² Though published in 1785, this work continued to be referred to into the 1800s. Examples would include:

- Pereira, J. (1842). *Elements of Materia Medica and Therapeutics*. Pereira acknowledges Withering's contributions to the understanding of digitalis, detailing its applications and effects based on Withering's original findings.
- Bennett, J. H. (1858). *The Principles and Practice of Medicine*. In this textbook, Bennett cites Withering's observations on the therapeutic effects of foxglove, emphasizing its role in managing dropsy and heart conditions.

¹ This appears to be equally true for the CBS Evening News anchor in the United States, defining American Standard English, and with the announcers of the NHK in Japan, defining Standard Japanese.

² Digitalis is derived from the foxglove plant, and is still used today in treatment of heart ailments.

The term dropsy has been replaced by the word edema, and is often related to congestive heart failure (CHF). Edema is, however, a word like fever that describes a symptom which can be related to a number of underlying conditions, including CHF, kidney failure, liver failure,

sepsis, or cancer.

The NASB translates ὄδρωπικός as *edema*—which works very well with the 4.6% of the population who are medical professionals, but less well with those who are not.

The Polar BEAR attempts to get at the difficulty in rendering this word for the general reader with: *There was a man there, right in front of him, suffering from a painful medical condition*.

Edema can also be related to pregnancy, but in that case the issue usually resolves itself in 9 months or so.

- Wood, H. C. (1866). *A Treatise on Therapeutics*. Wood references Withering's work when discussing the historical context and clinical applications of digitalis in treating dropsy and other ailments.
- Barnes, Joseph K., (1870). *The Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion*. This work discusses the use of digitalis in treating various conditions, referencing Withering's foundational studies on the plant's medicinal properties.
- Baker, J. (1875). *The Medical History of the Foxglove*. This publication specifically examines the historical use of foxglove in medicine, citing Withering's 1785 work as a critical reference point for its therapeutic applications.

However, the word started to disappear from the English language over the course of the 19th century, replaced by other, more precise diagnostic terms. The final published reference that I could locate that used this term was F. F. Hoffmann, “Dropsy; Its Therapeutics”, *Buffalo Medical Journal*, 1904 Jun; 43(11):725–730.¹

The word *dropsy* finally vanished completely from medical literature by 1905. And in the 21st century, not one Canadian in a thousand knows what sort of condition this diagnosis would refer to.²

The whole idea of *translation* is to take things from a language the reader does not understand, and express then in a language the reader *does* understand. If you produce a *translation* and your reader still does not know what the original author was saying, you have rather missed the point.

¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8768415/>

² I normally tell my Greek students that this was a simple oversight on the part of the ESV translation committee.

The day they translated Luke 14 was when the annual Crossway Publishing company picnic was happening, and two of the ESV scholars were signed up to referee the children's soccer game, and another

three were cooking bratwurst and burgers on grills they brought from home.

They said, *We could sit here trying to figure out how to render the word ὑδρωπικὸς for 21st century English speakers, or we could just go with the KJV rendering that was good enough in 1611. If we go with dropsy we can all head on down to Seven Gables Park now and get the BBQs fired up.*

“We Remember You”— μνείαν ποιούμενοι (1 Thess 1:2)

Even though the word μνείαν is only used 7 times in the NT, you can get to the place where you have a hunch about its translation even before you look it up.

There is a word group where the first three letters are μνε— or μνη— which all have to do with remembering: remembering of people who are your friends, remembering of people who have died, the tombs where dead people have been laid, etc.

- μνεία a memory; a mention of someone
- μνῆμα a monument, memorial
- μνημεῖον a grave, tomb
- μνήμη a memory, a memorial
- μνημονεύω to remember
- μνημοσύνη a memory
- μνημόσυνον a memorial offering
- μνησικακέω to remember evil; hold a grudge
- μνησίκακος vengeful

You will run into this μνε/μνη— word group all the time in passages that talk about Jesus rising from the tomb.

Greenwood and the Aorist Tense

I have found Kyle Greenwood, *Dictionary of English Grammar for Students of Biblical Languages* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020) enormously helpful. It does have one mysterious gap in it, however: it has no section on the aorist tense.

To rectify this gap, I created my own treatment of the aorist, formatted to be cut down with scissors to 4.5” by 6.5” dimensions. You may simply use a sharp knife and a ruler to cut the following page out of the current volume, and stick it inside your copy of Greenwood.

In the rest of this volume, I attempt to footnote carefully, to give credit to authors I used as sources. Because of my efforts to create a concise description of the aorist tense in a page that could be cut out and inserted in my copy of Greenwood, I have not footnoted at all.

This treatment includes several quotes and near-quotes from:

- Wallace, *Grammar*, op. cit.
- Rodney J. Decker, “The Poor Man’s Porter”, A condensation and summarization of *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* by Stanley E. Porter (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), <https://www.ntresources.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/porter.pdf>

Aorist

The basic function of the aorist is captured by the simple past tense in English. It is the story-teller's default verb tense, and so is the most common tense used in the Gospels and Acts.

Unlike the imperfect, which is like a video of the action as it unfolds, and emphasizes ongoing activity in the past (*He was walking*), the aorist is more like a snapshot that tells you that the action took place, but by itself doesn't tell you much more than that. The author is thinking of the action (the *aspect*) as complete or whole.

A snapshot of a student studying tells you that he studied, but doesn't tell you for how long. He might have studied for 10 minutes or 10 hours. He might have studied for 8 hours, with a break every 30 minutes.

50 years ago, Greek professors sometimes taught that the aorist was about *punctiliar* action. The student had his book open for a fraction of a second only...for just the time it took to snap the picture. But we realize now that this view of the aorist does not fit with the way NT writers used it. Snapshots do not tell you if the action was momentary or repeated at intervals. They just tell you the action happened. For more information, you must look to other clues in the context that surrounds the verb in question.

Romans 5:14 ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ θάνατος ἀπὸ Ἀδὰμ μέχρι Μωϋσέως *Death reigned from Adam to Moses*. The verb by itself tells you that the action happened. The context (*from Adam to Moses*) tells you that the action continued over a span of centuries.

There are two significant nuances in the way authors may use the aorist. **First**, it may be used to emphasize the initiation of a state or action. Jn. 11:35 ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς. *Jesus began to weep*.

Translators that give insufficient weight to the initiation-of-action use of the aorist can cause problems for us as Bible readers. Mark 13 speaks of the end of the world, culminating with the return of Jesus. If we use a variation of the simple past tense for the aorist in verse 30 (*this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened*), then the chapter is difficult to understand.

But if St. Mark used the aorist here, assuming his readers would understand it in terms of initiation-of-action, then the chapter reads more naturally (*this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things **begin to happen***).

The **second** nuance in how NT authors use the aorist occurs in the epistles. Paul sometimes uses the aorist to describe writing something or sending somebody, since from the perspective of the readers of the letter, that action of writing or sending is in the past. But the action is in present time from Paul's perspective, who is sitting there with pen in hand...and the most natural translation of this type of aorist is to use the English present tense. *I **am sending** [Tychicus] to you,*" [Τύχικον] **ἔπεμψα** πρὸς ὑμᾶς (Eph 6:22).

Sometimes verbal aspect (i.e. the way the action is visualized; in the case of the aorist, as *complete* or *whole*) completely overwhelms the past-time component of the aorist tense.

- Lk. 16:4—I ἔγνων **know** what I intend to do (time = **present**)
- John 17:14—the world ἐμίσησεν **is going to hate** them (time = **future**)
- Lk. 7:35—wisdom ἐδικαιώθη **is vindicated** by all her children (time = **omni-temporal**; always true: past, present and future).

Beginning students of Greek are safest to translate the aorist with the English simple past, unless the context demands otherwise.



Prepositions and Lexicons

There are some prepositions, such as ἐν in 1:1, that are always followed by nouns in a particular case. ἐν is invariably followed by a noun in the dative case. The translation of ἐν is always going to be along the lines of *in, inside, at, among, with*, as is appropriate to the context.

However, you cannot begin to translate the preposition περί until you look at the case of the noun that follows it. When περί is followed by a noun in the accusative case, it will be translated as *around, about, nearby*. However, when it is followed by a noun in the genitive case, it is translated as *about, concerning, in regard to*.

You are going to run into one or more prepositions in practically every verse you translate. I printed out the chart below and keep it taped to my desk, so I can easily refer to it for the most common ways to render frequently appearing prepositions.

Translation Helps

Preposition	Genitive	Dative	Accusative
ἀνά			up
ἀντί	instead of, in place of, for		
ἀπό	from, away from, of		
διά	through, by, with, at, during		because of, on account of
εἰς			into, to, for, in, toward, among, near, until
ἐκ	out of, from, by		
ἐν		in, within, by, with, among, near, on	
ἐπὶ	on, upon, at, about, over, when	upon, on, at, about, on the basis of	to, on, upon, at, for, about, against
κατά	against, down		according to, along, throughout, during
μετά	with, among		after, behind
παρά	from	with	beside, by, more than
περί	about, concerning, for		around, near
πρό	before, prior, in front of, at, above		
πρός	for, in the interest of	at	to, toward, with, at, by, near
σύν		with, besides	
ὑπέρ	on behalf of, because of, for, in place of, about		above, beyond, over
ὑπό	by, at the hands of		under, below

While this chart is helpful, there will be times when you need to dig into a lexicon to find a usage case for a given preposition that seems to fit with the context you are trying to translate from.

There are three main lexical resources you can draw on. The first are the relatively concise translations given in the *Meaning* section in STEP Bible.

STEP

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SBLG 1Th 1:2 Q

1 Thessalonians 1:2

2 Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε
 περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν · μνησάν
 ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν
 ἡμῶν, ἀδιαλείπτως

Word analysis

ἐπὶ (epi)
 'upon/to/against'
 (G1909)
 (Preposition)

This word occurs
 about 88x.

Meaning

- (gen.) on, over, when;
- (dat.) on, at, in, while;
- (acc.) across, over, on, to, for, while
- (i) with the *genitive*. **upon**.

If that does not help you, then you can dig into the LSJ section below. It contains the entry on the word from the Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon to Ancient Greek.

The LSJ (named after the primary editors, Liddell, Scott and Jones) is a general lexicon, attempting to cover the whole of the Ancient Greek period, dealing with classical authors like Plato or Thucydides, as well as with the LXX and the NT.

1 Thessalonians 1:2

2 Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε
 περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν · μνησάν
 ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν
 ἡμῶν, ἀδιαλείπτως

- **to the extent of**, both of place and time, Rev. 21:16 Rom. 7:1;
- **near, by**, Mt. 9:9;
- **about, at, of time**, Acts 3:1;
- **in order to**, with a view to, for the purpose of, Mt. 3:7; Lk. 7:44

LSJ dictionary

ἐπὶ,
 Thess. (before τ)
 [Refs 3rd c.BC+], to denote the **being upon or supported upon a surface or point**.
 A WITH GEN.:

Sometimes, even looking at the LSJ does not give you anything that seems to fit in the context of what you are translating.

The #1 lexical resource for NT Greek is called BDAG,¹ named after the primary editors: Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich. It has an advantage over the LSJ in that it deals only with vocabulary used in the LXX/NT and by early Christian authors. It doesn't deal with words that only occur in Classical works.

When it touches on words that were used by earlier authors, the BDAG only deals in the meanings those words had around the time that the NT was composed.

For instance, in its earliest usage, the English word *nice* meant *silly* or *foolish*. This is a far cry from its current positive connotation as a compliment. So if you were a non-native speaker, and using a dictionary that included definitions from the English of several centuries ago, you might completely miss the meaning of a sentence you are trying to translate.

This is something you need to be cautious about. The LSJ is a phenomenal resource—but it can sometimes lead you astray.

As I was trying to zero in on Paul's use of ἐπὶ in 1 Thess. 1:2, I finally found something that made sense in heading #18 of the BDAG entry on that word.

ἐπὶ

Table of Contents

- ἐπιμεναι
- ἐπιθρονον
- ἐπὶ
- ἐπιβαίνω
- ἐπιβάλλω
- ἐπιβαρέω
- ἐπιβιβάζω
- ἐπιβλέπω
- ἐπιβλημα
- ἐπιβοάω
- ἐπιβουλή
- ἐπιγαμβρεύω
- ἐπίγειος
- ἐπιγελάω
- ἐπιγίνωμαι
- ἐπιγινώσκω
- ἐπίγνωσις
- ἐπιγραφή
- ἐπιγράφω

ἐκρυσσεῖν οὐμνονία Lk 9:49 v.t. ἐρχεσθαι Mt 24:5, Mk 13:8, Lk 21:8. κηρύσσειν 24:47. λαλεῖν Ac 4:17; 5:40. Semantically divergent from the preceding, but formulaically analogous, is καλεῖν τινα ἐ, τῷ ὄν, τινος name someone after someone (2 Esdr 17:63) Lk 1:59.—δνομα idy

λ.—M-M.

(18) marker of temporal associations, in the time of, at, on, for

(a) w. gen., time within which an event or condition takes place (Hom.+) in the time of, under (kings or other rulers): in the time of Elisha Lk 4:27 (cp. Just., D. 46, 6 ἐ, Ἡλίου). ἐ, τῆς μετοικεσίας at the time of the exile Mt 1:11. Under=during the rule or administration of (Hes., Op. 111; Hdt. 6, 98 al.; OGI 90, 15; PAmh 43, 2 [173 B.C.]; UPZ 162 V, 5 [117 B.C.]; 1 Esdr 2:12; 1 Macc 13:42; 2 Macc 15:22; Jos., Ant. 12, 156 ἐ, ἀρχιερέως Ὁ.) ἐ, Ἀβιαθάρ ἀρχιερέως under, in the time of, Abiathar the high priest Mk 2:26. ἐ, ἀρχιερέως Ἀννα καὶ Καϊάφα Lk 3:2. ἐ, Κλαυδίου Ac 11:28 (Just., A I, 26, 2). ἐ, τῶν πατέρων in the time of the fathers 1 Cl 23:3. ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν in the last days (Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Mi 4:1; Jer 37:24; Da 10:14) 2 Pt 3:3; Hs 9, 12, 3; cp. Hb 1:2. ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τοῦ χρόνου in the last time Jd 18. ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν χρόνων at the end of the times/ages 1 Pt 1:20. ἐ, τῶν προσευχῶν μου when I pray, in my prayers (cp. PTebt 58, 31 [111 B.C.] ἐ, τ. διαλόγου, 'in the discussion'; 4 Macc 15:19 ἐ, τ. βασάνων 'during the tortures'; Sir 37:29; 3 Macc 5:40; Demetr.: 722, Fgm. 1, 14 Jac. ἐ, τοῦ ἀρίστου; Synes., Ep. 121 p. 258c ἐ, τῶν κοινῶν ἱερῶν) Ro 1:10; Eph 1:16; 1 Th 1:2; Phlm 4.

(b) w. dat. time at or during which (Hom. et al. PTebt 5, 66 [118 B.C.]; PAmh 157; LXX.

¹ Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed.

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

This was an instance where I spent 10 or 15 minutes trying to dial in my translation of one tiny word.

While I have a digital copy of BDAG, I also have purchased a hard copy. Rodney Decker published a helpful essay about the BDAG, which contains this quote.

The inevitable question that must arise upon the publication of any such book is, "Should I buy it?" If you are a student of the Greek NT and have not yet purchased a standard lexicon, the answer is an unqualified, emphatic Yes.

You will never accomplish any serious exegesis if you remain forever with only a beginner's lexicon (as Newman's Dictionary¹ must be judged; it has other limitations as well). There is no other equivalent tool. Louw and Nida's Lexicon² has a different focus altogether. Abbott-Smith³ is much more limited (though handy enough to carry on vacation). Thayer⁴ ought not even be considered since his work is both inaccurate and seriously out of date (it is *pre-papyri*). The only other major lexicon is Liddell and Scott,⁵ but that work focuses primarily on classical Greek even though the LXX and NT are included.

So buy BDAG (sell your car if necessary!) and learn to use it. You will not regret your purchase.⁶

¹ Barclay M. Newman, Jr. *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, Revised ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2010).

² Johannes P. Louw, and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols. 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989).

³ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922).

⁴ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being*

Grimm's Wilke's *Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1889).

⁵ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed., with Revised Supplement (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

⁶ Rodney J. Decker, *An Introduction to the Bauer/Danker Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (2003), <https://www.logos.com/grow/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/DeckerRodneyAnIntroductionToBDAG.pdf>.

Textual Variations

If you are using the SBL Greek New Testament at STEP Bible, 1 Thess. 1:1 will introduce you to an interesting feature in the text.



Where you see a tiny triangle in the text, it is an indication that there are some differences of wording in various ancient Greek manuscripts. Hover your mouse over the triangle and you will see a cryptic popup appear at the top of the screen.

▼ εἰρήνη = WH Treg NA/NIV: || εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ = RP

This tells us that *grace and peace to you* is the form of the Greek text followed by the **Westcott and Hort** (WH) edition of the Greek NT (GNT), the **Tregelles** (Treg) version of the GNT, the **Nestle-Aland** (NA) edition, and the Greek text used by the translators of the **NIV** version.

A longer form of this verse is printed in the **Robinson-Pierpoint** (RP) version of the GNT, where the words ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ *from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* are added.

The translators of the King James Version used an edition of the GNT edited by Erasmus, who built his first edition of 1516 from 7 manuscripts created between the 12th and the 15th centuries.¹ Robinson and Pierpoint have made accessible to modern readers the basic Greek text used by these translators.

The RP edition of the GNT is favored by people who have a deep emotional attachment to the King James Version, and believe that God miraculously

¹ It is not that Erasmus had a bias against older manuscripts. It is that the wealth of early manuscripts of the NT that we have

access to today had not yet been discovered in 1611.

preserved the original text of the New Testament in the GNT edition created by Erasmus.

In contrast, the editions of WH, Treg, NA and NIV draw on the 5,800 NT manuscripts that have been discovered in the years following the publication of the KJV. Some of these manuscripts go back to the second—or possibly even the first—century. We don't have the original copy of John's gospel,¹ for instance, but we do have second generation copies, or perhaps even first generation copies, of his original.²

While WH/Treg/NA/NIV all certainly take into account copies of the NT made in the Medieval period, they have a bias in favor of manuscripts that were copied out closer to the time when the originals were composed.

NetBible has what amounts to an excellent introduction to manuscript issues in their TC (text-critical) notes.³

Go to <https://netbible.org/bible/1+Thessalonians+1> and click on footnote 3 to see a discussion of the longer and shorter versions of this verse.

As each NT Greek manuscript has been discovered, it has been assigned a letter, a number, or a symbol to uniquely identify it. The two oldest, complete copies we have of the Bible in Greek are Codex Sinaiticus (referred to by the Hebrew alphabet letter Ⲛ) and Codex Vaticanus (referred to by an upper case B). They were both made sometime between A.D. 325 and 350, probably in Alexandria, Egypt.

Christians in Egypt were enormously serious about Scripture and Scripture memorization.

In 1897, a pair of British archaeologists uncovered a treasure trove of tens of thousands of papyrus documents at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. From this dig,

¹ ...which is just as well. We might be tempted to worship the manuscript rather than the Person to whom the manuscript points.

² If the original was written on parchment, as seems likely, it could have remained usable as an original-from-which-to-make-copies for several hundred years.

³ This use of the word *critical* does not mean *critical* in the sense of *You spoke for too long during the business meeting* but rather in the 19th century sense of *analysis*. This sense of the word endures in the titles of *movie critic* or *music critic*. The job of people in these roles is not to be consistently negative, but to analyze movies and music, and highlight both the good and the bad.

we know that there were three men who lived (most likely) between AD 100 and 300, named Samuel, Jacob and Aaron, who applied to be deacons. Their pastor, named Abraham, assigned them:

*...to master the Gospel according to John and learn it by heart by the end of Pentecost, and to recite it.*¹

Shortly after this period there was an Egyptian believer named Pachomius who established a number of retreat centers. Any person that wanted to attend a retreat center had first to memorize 20 Psalms, or two Epistles of Paul.²

Given the importance they placed on Scripture memory as an essential component of discipleship, I would be considered unqualified to hold any sort of leadership position in the early Egyptian church. And I fear that I am not alone in this. Most of us are not very diligent about memorizing Scripture.

Beyond this, Alexandria hosted the leading *university* in the Roman Empire. They had several sophisticated *scriptoriums* where documents were copied, applying rigorous standards to ensure accuracy in their copies.

The combination of a passion for Jesus and a commitment to academic excellence was a powerful one. Consequently, when codices **N** and B agree with each other, I believe I am seeing more or less exactly what the original biblical writer composed.

¹ Bruce M. Metzger, and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 127, n. 123.


² If we have a church retreat today, normally the only requirement for attendance is that the registration fee is paid on time.

I have often wondered how church history might have unfolded differently had there been no Arab conquest of Egypt in the AD 600s, and the Egyptian church had been left free to exert influence on the church in Rome and further west.


This requirement for 20 Psalms or two epistles of Paul is widely quoted around

the web, but I could not find a primary source for it, so I do not know for sure if this is accurate.

My best guess is that the source of the quote is *The Life of Pachomius* a work written in Greek and composed shortly after the death of Pachomius in A.D. 346. The text of this work appears to be available in François Halkin, ed. *Le Corpus Athénien De Saint Pachome*, Cahiers d'Orientalisme 2 (Geneva: Patrick Cramer, 1982). But even if I could read a commentary in French—which I cannot—I could not locate a hard copy of this work.

On the other hand,  (a Gothic M) signifies the enormous number of late, Medieval manuscripts that we have that are related to those original seven Medieval manuscripts used by Erasmus and the KJV translators.

My general perspective is that if I have a choice between 10 manuscripts copied somewhere between A.D. 100 and 400, and 100 manuscripts copied between A.D. 1100 and 1400, I am going to go with the early evidence.

Part of what makes this particular textual variant interesting is that **℣** and B are *not* in agreement with each other, while **℣** and  *do* agree together. This is a slightly rare occurrence, which makes the *tc* note at NetBible particularly interesting reading.

Case Study: 1 Thessalonians 3:2

Some scribes who made copies of 1 Thessalonians were uncomfortable with the idea that any person could be a *coworker* with God, and substituted διάκονον *servant/minister* of God. Alternatively, they omitted the τοῦ θεοῦ, which would make it clear that Timothy was a coworker—but with a strong implication that he was a coworker of *Paul*.

Timothy was a coworker of Paul's, of course. That is not the issue. The issue is whether this is what is being talked about in 1 Thessalonians 3:2 or not.

A good introduction to textual analysis¹ may be had by looking at the notes at <https://NETBible.org>. In every verse where there are significant textual differences² NET Bible will have a comment, flagged as a *tc* note³.

In the case of this verse, the NET Bible analysis is heavy going to read. There are a couple of phrases that you should be aware of, which may help you to make sense of this note. It speaks of the reading found in some manuscripts of συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ as being *the harder reading*.

¹ Typically called textual criticism, using a 19th century understanding of *criticism* as being the same as what we call *analysis*.

² *Significant* means *affecting the meaning/translation of the verse*. Most textual variants in the NT are insignificant

spelling differences, such as the difference between the American *color* and the British *colour*. In Canada, we are often confused about how to spell this word, and use both variants.

³ For text critical or text analysis note.

There is a principle here that is used in evaluating manuscripts, which is that if some scribe is going to make an intentional change in the text, it will be in the direction of making the Bible seem easier to understand rather than harder. The idea of being a *coworker with God* is startling to us, whereas the idea of being a *servant of God* is not challenging or difficult for us at all.

Had Paul's original epistle, so the thinking goes, written about Timothy being a servant of God, no scribe would have been surprised, and almost surely nobody would have intentionally changed *servant of God* to *coworker with God*. Doing so would have amounted to introducing theological difficulties into a passage where none existed before.

The other thing to be aware of is the Gothic M—**℣**—that occurs in reference to various manuscripts. You will recall that **℣** refers not to one manuscript, but to a whole family of medieval manuscripts, made by scribes that had a low tolerance for paradox or cognitive dissonance. If any scribes are going to change a difficult reading into a plain vanilla reading, one which contains no surprises or theological challenges, it will be the **℣** manuscripts.

While the manuscript evidence is complex for this particular verse, it is often the case that where there are textual differences, you will find Codex Vaticanus (B) and Codex Sinaiticus (ℵ)—both manuscripts that were made around A.D. 325—on one side and the **℣** manuscripts—made a thousand years later—on the other. In that case, I always go with B and ℵ. The scribes who made B and ℵ seem to have been more interested in copying out the exact words of the NT writers rather than in making sure there was nothing challenging in the text.

In this verse, the **℣** family of manuscripts changed *coworker with God* to καὶ διάκονον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ συνεργὸν ἡμῶν *and a servant of God and our fellow worker*.

If you are reading a tc note in NET Bible, keep in mind that a *harder reading* is a *good thing*, and is often considered more likely to have been original. Also, any variant supported by **℣** is more likely to have been changed.

There are often things in the Bible that we find startling, or even paradoxical. When we run into those, our job is not to say—as did the scribes that made the

A family of manuscripts sometime in the Medieval period—Oh, that cannot possibly be true. I'll just change the text to fit better with what I already believe.¹

No. Our job is to see surprising/startling/incongruous elements in the Bible as an opportunity to grow in our understanding of God.

How to “Go For Coffee with a Greek Scholar”

When I get in a jam on some Greek translation issue or other, I phone up Syd Page, a Professor Emeritus at Taylor Seminary in Edmonton, and ask if we can go out for coffee together. Not only is he an authority on the Greek NT, but he had F.F. Bruce for his faculty advisor when he did his PhD in Manchester, England. So he has interesting stories to tell.

One of which is that Bruce had the entire Greek NT memorized. He could lecture without notes or a printed Bible for as much time as his students wanted to give him.

What we all need is our own Syd Page to help us when we get into a jam while reading the New Testament.

While you cannot phone Syd up and say, *How did you handle this odd bit of grammar?*, there are people like Syd that you can ask, so to speak.

The most widely-used English versions of the Bible had an enormous number of people giving input—individuals with a life-long passion for the Word of God. Though we cannot ask them to explain their translation decisions directly, we can work backwards from their translations to infer something about how they handled the challenges that we are faced with in the Greek text.

If you go into a web browser and enter this into the address line:

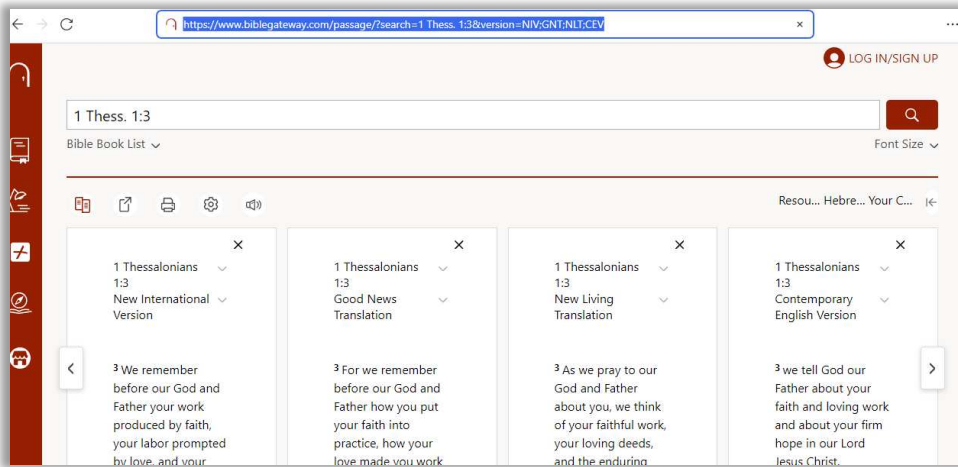
[https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1 Thess. 1:3&version=NIV;GNT;NLT;CEV](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thess.%201:3&version=NIV;GNT;NLT;CEV)

¹ This is not just something that Medieval scribes did.

I was in a church once where the elders decided that if it was an *elder* or the *pastor* that sinned against a congregation member, Matthew 18:15— *If your brother sins against you, go and talk to him, just between him and you.*—did not apply.

Whenever a congregation member tried to talk to an elder one-on-one, the elder would bring *other* elders, and the meeting then became not about reconciliation, but about the elders circling the wagons, and *winning* in a conflict situation with an individual member.

...you will end up with a web page that looks like this.



You can inspect these versions side by side, and know that they were all working from pretty much the same Greek text as you are using. You can see what their translation decisions were, and work backwards to the kinds of grammatical decisions they made. The Bible translators become your own personal language coaches.

Here is what I came up with when I investigated the number of people who worked on these versions.

Good News Translation: 6 primary translators for the NT, plus a Review Panel consisting of prominent theologians and Biblical scholars appointed by the American Bible Society Board of Managers who reviewed drafts. Beyond this, drafts were also sent to major English-speaking Bible Societies around the world for comments and suggestions.

New International Version: There is a core group of 15 biblical scholars, known as the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT). They oversaw the work of a larger team of over 100 scholars from various countries and denominations.

Contemporary English Version: This version had more than a hundred people involved in the various stages of the text creation and review process. This included more than forty Translation Consultants from Bible societies worldwide. These would be people with experience in Bible translation into a wide variety of language groups.

New Living Translation: The NLT also involved more than a hundred people in the various stages of the text creation and review process.

Of course, many of the scholars referred to here were working on the Old Testament. But still, when you look at the NT portions of these four versions collectively, you are surely getting access to 50 or 100 of the world's best minds among people who love God and love his Word.

If you struggle with rendering a verse, check in with these people and see how they handled it. Even if you do not struggle with a given verse, when you finish translating it yourself, it would not hurt to see what top-flight translators did with it.

Once I look at these four versions side by side, there is one other that I like to check:

[https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1 Thess. 1:3&version=Phillips](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thess.%201:3&version=Phillips)

J.B. Phillips graduated with honors in Classical Greek and English from Cambridge, and became an Anglican pastor. He began work on his translation while being stuck for hours at a time in London bomb shelters during WW2, because he found that the young people of his congregation could not understand the KJV when they read it.¹

Although his translation is 50+ years old now²—and although I have a general preference for versions completed by *teams* of scholars³—it is the best one-man translation I know of. Phillips worked hard not just with the text but with his imagination, to enter into the minds of the Biblical writers. The level of empathy he developed with NT authors is almost without parallel.

¹ Before the explosion in the number of Bible translations during the 1970s, every staff member of Canada's Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship had a Phillips NT in his bag.

² He completed his final revision of the translation in 1972.

³ It is an irony that if Wycliffe Bible Translators is going to produce a translation for a language spoken by just

2,000 people, it undergoes a rigorous process of verification and editing. But anybody can publish a translation in English, a language understood by a billion people, with no checking process at all.

Of course, I am including my Polar BEAR version in this volume—a one-man translation—so I suppose I need to look in the mirror when it comes to this critique.

Translation Helps

I often think that if the Apostle Paul had written in modern English rather than Koine Greek, what he wrote might have sounded a good bit like the Phillips' translation.

NET Bible Notes

Another resource for you to be aware of are the notes available at the NET Bible website (<https://netbible.org>). In these notes, the translators talk about the issues they faced, and discuss some of the alternative ways they could have translated a given verse or phrase, and why they made the decision they did.

Reading the NET notes is like looking over the translator's shoulder.

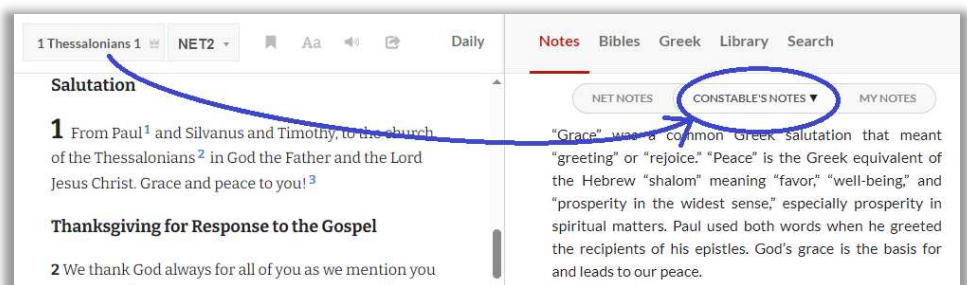
Constable's Notes

Tom Constable, a professor retired from Dallas Theological Seminary, has composed commentaries on all 66 books of the Bible and has made them available for free through the NetBible web site. It would cost a person hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of dollars to purchase any other complete set of commentaries on the Bible.

While Constable's Notes are a commentary on the English text of Scripture, and do not interact directly with the Greek or Hebrew, they are still hugely valuable—and free.

When you first arrive at the NetBible web site, you will default to viewing the *Net Notes* in the right hand window pane. Click on *Constables Notes* to view his commentary.

In this screen capture, you can see he comments on the words *grace* and *peace*.



ICC Volumes

A technical commentary series called the *International Critical Commentaries* was published in the late 19th and early 20th century.

While as a general rule, I have a preference for newer reference works rather than older ones, the truth is that the authors of the ICC volumes got an education in Greek, often starting in junior high school and continuing through university, the likes of which is virtually unavailable today. The breadth of their knowledge is astonishing, and their commentaries are still used now, over a century later.

Most of the volumes are in the public domain, and can be accessed from:

<https://archive.org/details/internationalcriticalcommentary/NT/20. ICC Matthew/page/n13/mode/2up>

...for reading online or downloading. If you download using the option *PDF with text*, then you will be able to use <ctrl><f> to search the commentary for particular words or phrases.

Artificial Intelligence

While I much rather go for coffee with a living, breathing Syd Page, or even work backwards to grammatical principles from looking at the Good News Translation, I am finding that there is help to be had from online AIs.

As of September 2024, there are six main consumer-facing AIs.

- Perplexity.AI
- Claude.AI
- You.com
- Microsoft's Copilot
- Google's Gemini
- ChatGPT

Of these, **ChatGPT** is *totally* useless.¹

¹ Note that all of these evaluations are current as of September, 2024.

AIs are not just changing from month to month, but things that they

It does not appear to be Koine-aware at all. Whenever I ask it a question about a challenging bit of grammar, it responds by saying the problem in the passage probably was a result of transcription errors by early scribes.¹

Gemini is *mostly* useless for addressing translation problems in the NT.²

Google is making \$73 *billion* dollars a year with their current Internet search model—the model where the first several returns from any query you enter are paid ads and sponsored content, and where, for the sake of *engagement* they feed you what they think you want to hear rather than what might be the most accurate and relevant responses.

Google's heart is simply not in developing a useful AI. I think they have assigned all their Gemini development to interns who are still in high-school.

Copilot and **You.com** are *slightly* useful.

Both seem to be aware of Koine Greek. But they engage with questions at a fairly shallow level.

Claude³ and **Perplexity** are both *fluent* in Ancient Greek.⁴

could not do a week ago they may be able to do today. So you will need to do your own research on this. Submit a question you have about NT Greek to each of these, and see how they respond. You may also ask a couple of them who the main consumer-facing AIs are, as this is likely to change as well.

¹ 30 seconds of research looking at the footnotes in your Greek NT, or going to NetBible.org, will tell you that this is not so. ChatGPT would much rather make something up than to tell you that it does not know. It is the 14 year old adolescent of the AIs.

² It is equally useless in answering questions about Aurelius or Herodotus.

³ Claude version 3.5 Sonnet is very well informed. Sometimes, because of the number of people using Claude, Anthropic bumps all the users of their free web

service back down to Claude version 3.5 Haiku or version 3.0. I find it is not worthwhile posing a question to Claude Haiku or version 3.0. So keep an eye on the box where you enter your question. It will tell you what version of Claude it will be using.

⁴ Last week, as I was working on a passage, I asked Perplexity if it had memorized Aurelius's *Meditations*, or if it translated it on the fly every time I asked it a question. It told me that it had not memorized Aurelius, nor did it translate it on the fly. It told me that it had been trained on a vast array of Greek literature, and it draws on its general knowledge of Greek grammar and vocabulary, as well as a more specific knowledge of Aurelius's writing style and philosophical concepts.

Frankly, I am not sure how this differs from what I do when I *translate*

They can translate the Ionic (Classical) Greek of Herodotus as well as the Koine Greek of the New Testament and of Aurelius.

They are both inclined to tell you when they don't have enough context to answer your question with any hope of being accurate in their answer. If you then copy-and-paste the four or five sentences that wrap around the phrase you originally asked about, they tell you that in light of the broader context you have provided, they can now answer your question...and they do, with an answer that makes sense!

Here is a sample of a conversation I had with Perplexity Pro.

Consider this sentence, from 1 Thess. 1:2-3.

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν μνείαν ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν, ἀδιαλείπτως μνημονεύοντες ὑμῶν τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν,

Why is τοῦ ἔργου in the genitive case?

The phrase τοῦ ἔργου is in the genitive case in this passage from 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 for some important reasons:

Object of Remembrance: The genitive τοῦ ἔργου is part of what is being remembered. In Greek, verbs of remembering often take their object in the genitive case.

Part of a Parallel Structure: This genitive phrase is part of a series of genitives in the verse, including τῆς πίστεως (of faith), τῆς ἀγάπης (of love), and τῆς ἐλπίδος (of hope). This parallel structure emphasizes the qualities being remembered and praised.

The *part of a parallel structure* made intuitive good sense to me, but I wanted confirmation that the *verbs of remembering* point was actually true. So I asked Perplexity if it could guide me to some references on this point, and it sent me

Greek. I too draw on my general knowledge of Greek grammar and vocabulary.

to Herbert Weir Smyth, *A Greek Grammar for Colleges* (New York: American Book Company, 1920), §1343 to §1371.

Smyth is an older reference, but still a goldmine of information on Greek grammar. I asked a further question, since Paul was remembering their *works* of faithfulness and love, not just one work of each.

Paul must be remembering several works of faith, and several works of love. Why are τοῦ ἔργου and τοῦ κόπου singular rather than plural?

You've raised an insightful question about the use of singular nouns (τοῦ ἔργου and τοῦ κόπου) in 1 Thessalonians 1:3, even though Paul is likely referring to multiple works of faith and labors of love. There are several reasons for this usage:

Collective Singular: In Greek, a singular noun can be used to represent a class or category of things. Here, τοῦ ἔργου (the work) and τοῦ κόπου (the labor) likely represent the entirety of the Thessalonians' faithful works and loving labors, respectively.

Emphasis on Quality: The singular form can emphasize the quality or nature of the work and labor rather than their quantity. Paul is focusing on the character of their faith-driven actions and love-inspired efforts.

Genitive Construction: The phrases τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως (work of faith) and τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης (labor of love) are genitive constructions. The singular form helps to create a more abstract or conceptual idea, emphasizing the source (faith and love) rather than individual instances.

Stylistic Choice: The use of singular nouns creates a parallel structure with τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος (endurance of hope), maintaining consistency in the triad of faith, love, and hope.

Theological Implication: The singular form might suggest that all their various works stem from a single, unified faith, and all their labors from a single, cohesive love.

This use of the singular for what are likely multiple actions is a common Greek idiom, allowing Paul to speak of the Thessalonians' faith and love in a more comprehensive and qualitative manner, rather than simply enumerating individual acts.

Of these, the pointers to the Collective Singular and the Stylistic Choice made the best sense to me. Presumably I could track down the veracity of the other reasons...but I felt I had enough to justify to myself the use of the singular forms to refer to plural works of faith and love.

The point here is that AIs, particularly Perplexity and Claude, are Koine-Greek-Aware enough to be useful as you are looking for help in translating difficult verses.

Notes for Commentators

I shall talk about some tools you can use to make the task of developing a commentary easier.

Further, I think many of us could probably teach an adult Sunday School class in our church to introduce people to NT Greek. So I shall talk a bit about an approach that may make this task easier as well.

Translation Philosophy in the Digital Age

There are two broad philosophies of Bible translation:

- **dynamic equivalence**—which emphasizes communicating the basic message of the passage using modern language and expression, and which may rearrange words or use different idioms to convey the original meaning more clearly
- **formal equivalence**—which attempts to translate each word of the original language into an equivalent word in the target language, striving as much as possible to maintain the original grammar, sentence structure, and word order.

The GNT and NLT exemplify the best of the dynamic equivalence translations. The ESV and NASB are typical of the best of the formal equivalence translations

In the pre-digital age, where printing presses produced a thousand (or a hundred thousand) copies before the first volume had been sold, you needed to select your translation philosophy and stick with it.

NET Bible was the first version to adjust to the existence of the Internet, and to take advantage of the cloud. The NET translators produced a dynamic equivalence translation...but then included 60,000+ footnotes that explain the translation decisions they made, and indicate what a formal equivalence rendering of the verse might look like. This is something that can only really be done in a web browser.

You can replicate the NET Bible approach. Pick whatever translation philosophy you feel is most appropriate, and then include notes *in the cloud* that:

- explain what the text actually *means* in common English (assuming you chose a formal translation style), OR...
- explain what the text *says* and how you made your decisions about how to render it (if you chose a dynamic translation style).

I started as a computer programmer in the pre-Internet era, and so made use of early-Internet techniques when they became available, and then never moved much beyond that. So for my students, I actually keep my translation notes on a traditional web server that sits in the spare bedroom at home.

Presumably, in the social media era—which I have never adapted to, and of which I remain largely ignorant—there are other places to post your translation comments.

If you want your translation comments to outlive you, then only post them in locations that will NOT be deleted if your account goes dormant.

Evaluating AIs

Any evaluation of AIs is a snapshot in time. Consequently, it may be helpful to give some suggestions based on how I evaluated the various AI options that are available.

<https://dailydoseofgreek.com/scripture-passage/comparing-generative-artificial-intelligence-platforms-in-answering-greek-questions/> will give you a picture of what I learned about AIs in October of 2024.

After making that video, I discovered that Perplexity PRO often generated exactly the same wording to a question as Claude. Any differences were ones where Perplexity was a little less detailed.

I inferred that Perplexity's knowledge of Greek is (most likely) derived from Claude. It has purchased access to Claude, but is configured run its queries *at a lower temperature*. This is to say, Perplexity can choose configure a query to an AI using different parameters (we as end-users cannot change this). Perplexity specifies that Claude should be a little less detailed in its answers, and perhaps a little faster in delivering them.

Because of its use as an alternative to Google, I already had a PRO account from Perplexity before starting to use AIs in NT studies.

The free version of Claude gives me full access to its power, but limits the number of questions I can access in any given 5 hour period.

So I use Claude for asking questions in Ancient Greek until I run out of freebies, then I fall back to Perplexity.

At intervals, I take a question I have from the Greek NT, and address it to Claude, Perplexity, You.com, DeepSeek.com, Gemini, Copilot and ChatGPT. Comparing their answers allows me to update my snapshot of the state of AI technology. Further, it is possible to use an AI to evaluate other AIs.

In December of 2024, I asked Perplexity *Are there any AIs which would likely be better than Claude 3.5 Sonnet at analyzing the grammar and vocabulary of Koine Greek texts?*

It replied: *there don't appear to be any consumer-facing AI tools that are likely to outperform Claude 3.5 Sonnet specifically for analyzing the grammar and vocabulary of Koine Greek texts.*

It's important to note that Claude 3.5 Sonnet has demonstrated exceptional capabilities in graduate-level reasoning tasks and language understanding. While specialized tools like KoineGPT might offer targeted features for Koine Greek study, there's no clear evidence that they would surpass Claude 3.5 Sonnet's overall analytical capabilities for this task.

Asking the Right Questions

There is no handbook yet existing that tells you how to ask questions of an AI. You are on your own to experiment, and to see what gives you the best results. This is the best I have come up with so far.

1. Open a new query for Claude.AI.
2. Upload a PDF file containing a model of the kind of output that you are seeking. In my case, I uploaded my commentary on 1 Thess 1:2-3.¹

¹ 2 ½ pages of text. Do not upload too much. Your queries are limited not by the

number of questions you ask, but by the number of *tokens* that are uploaded in the

3. Insert this text in the query field:

Consider this NT verse.

1 Thess. 4:6 τὸ μὴ ὑπερβαίνειν καὶ πλεονεκτεῖν ἐν τῷ πράγματι τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, διότι ἔκδικος κύριος περὶ πάντων τούτων, καθὼς καὶ προείπαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ διεμαρτυράμεθα.

Create a scholarly commentary, elaborating on the grammar and vocabulary. Model the depth of your commentary on the attached model document. Also, seek to match the format of the attached document as you produce your output.

Even though I included a commentary section of my own as a model, Claude still ended up using technical phrases such as *participle of attendant circumstance* and *articular infinitive*.

Given that the target audience for my commentary is second year Greek students, I tried to translate this sort of grammatical into everyday English. The latter, for instance, I described as *the article τὸ + infinitive construction*.

It will be important for you to get citations for anything that is not transparently obvious to you. Perplexity.AI persists in footnoting comments from Reddit. I want to say *Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who is this Joe Schmuck at Reddit, and why should I believe him?* So you need to press Perplexity all the time (and Claude some of the time) to come up with support from reputable sources.

Claude.AI seems to have digested all of Dan Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, and can even come up with page numbers that you can check out on your own.

Do Not Throw Away Your Greek Grammars

I had one question about the case of articular infinitives, and Claude gave me a precise and comprehensive answer. But it included no footnotes. I asked it to support what it had just said, and it replied that it had erred in making overly definitive statements. It asked *me* to give *it* references from Blass-Debrunner-

query and downloaded in the answers. I don't know what a *token* is, as pertains to an AI, but it seems that the longer and more complex your questions are, the

more likely you are to get a message saying *You are out of free questions. Would you like to upgrade to a Pro account?*

Funk and Dan Wallace for it to review to check its perceptions. So I was left typing a followup query into Claude that included section numbers from BDF and pages numbers from Wallace.

Case Study: John 5:2

I have been intrigued by the use of ἔστιν in John 5:2 *There **is** in Jerusalem, near the Sheep Gate, a pool called—in Aramaic—Bethesda....*

This present tense verb is like an island in an ocean of aorist and imperfect verbs, and raises in my mind a question about whether John wrote this gospel before Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70.

Of course, there is such a thing as the historical present. The question one has to ask is whether the verb εἰμί is a verb that Greek authors used in this way. Dan Wallace thinks not,¹ but this is a classic case where you can be well served by an AI that surveys several million words of Greek literature,² and assesses how the verbs are used in their various contexts.

Dan Wallace indicates that he reviewed every instance of εἰμί in the New Testament, and found zero usage of the historical present. He then goes on to say that there are perhaps no instances of this in the whole of Greek literature. This is a big claim—but a big claim coming from a brilliant Greek scholar.

The best use of an AI is when you are pretty sure you can recognize when it is telling you the truth to begin with. If an AI confirms something that Dan Wallace said, then there is a pretty good chance it is true.

Here is a conversation I had with Claude.AI.

Review Greek literature from Homer to the second century A.D. to determine if there are any unequivocal uses of εἰμί as a historical present.

Mention some of the authors included in your review.

¹ Wallace, *Grammar*, op. cit., 531.
See also Daniel B. Wallace, *John 5:2 and the Date of the Fourth Gospel...Again*, <https://bible.org/article/john-52-and-date-fourth-gospel-again>.

² There are more than 15 million words of Greek text in the *Loeb Classical Library*. See the footnote in 2:5 for more discussion of this.

I'll provide a concise overview of my review of Greek literature for unequivocal uses of εἰμί as a historical present, and offer to elaborate on any specific aspects you're interested in.

My review covered major Greek authors from Homer through the 2nd century AD, including:

- Homer (8th century BC)
- Hesiod (8th-7th century BC)
- Pindar (5th century BC)
- The major Attic tragedians: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides (5th century BC)
- Herodotus and Thucydides (5th century BC)
- Plato and Xenophon (5th-4th century BC)
- Aristotle (4th century BC)
- Hellenistic poets like Callimachus and Apollonius of Rhodes (3rd century BC)
- Polybius (2nd century BC)
- Plutarch (1st-2nd century AD)
- Lucian (2nd century AD)

After reviewing these authors, I did not find any unequivocal uses of εἰμί as a historical present.

The verb εἰμί is generally not used in the historical present tense in classical Greek literature. The historical present is more commonly found with other verbs, particularly those describing actions or events.

Dating the composition of the Gospel of John based on a single word may seem like a reach. However, it is not unlike the passage in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* where, after 15 years alone on the island, he discovers a single footprint in the sand. That discovery marks a turning point in the story, dramatically changing Crusoe's entire perception of his situation.

In the same way, John's casual use of ἔστιν in 5:2 opened up possibilities for further research, which ultimately resulted in a dramatic change in my entire perception of the date of composition for this gospel.¹

Case Study: Acts 20:3

While Claude was enormously helpful on John 5:2, it was considerably less so in the exchange below.

Are there other NT examples similar to Acts 20:3, where γίνομαι is followed by a genitive noun which expresses achieving a particular state of mind or decision?

Yes, there are other examples in the New Testament where the verb γίνομαι is followed by a genitive noun to express achieving a particular state of mind or decision. Here are a few examples:

1. Acts 5:24 - "Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were perplexed (ἀπορήσαντες) about them, wondering what this would come to."

The genitive noun ἀπορήσαντες (perplexed) expresses the state of being the captain and chief priests found themselves in after hearing the words.

2. Acts 19:17 - "And this became known (ἐγένετο γνωστὸν) to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks."

The genitive noun γνωστὸν (known) expresses the resulting state of the information becoming widely known.

The problem with both of these responses is that they are WRONG, WRONG, WRONG.

First, in Acts 5:24, the word ἀπορήσαντες is not used at all!!!! And even if it was used, it is not a noun.

¹ This article investigates several hypotheses to account for John 5:2. Daniel

B. Wallace, *John 5:2 and the Date of the Fourth Gospel*, *Biblica* 71, no. 2 (1990): 177-205.

Second, γνωστόν is an adjective rather than a noun, and it is nominative rather than genitive.¹

AI Action Steps

The bottom line here is that AI is *not* a terrific tool for your students to use—since their knowledge of Greek is rudimentary. They will find it difficult to identify moments when the AI is making stuff up, as was Claude in the discussion of Acts 20:3. On the other hand, it can be a helpful tool for *you*, as it was for me in John 5:2.

The key appears to be that you need some prior knowledge to be able to recognize when an AI is making stuff up. I was able to trust Claude on John 5:2 because it was reaffirming something that Dan Wallace had already said about the non-existence in Ancient Greek of a historical-present use of the verb εἰμί, both in his grammar of NT Greek, as well as in articles he had written on John 5:2.

The other thing is that AIs are evolving not just month to month, but from week to week. So it will need to become a part of your investigative routine to enumerate the AI players, and to address a typical question from your NT studies to all the players, so you can compare them, and assess their capabilities at that instant.

Teaching Greek Inductively

When I started learning Greek back in 1972, we used a textbook that implemented a standard teaching technique for the time: memorize a rule, see it applied in some short made-up phrases, memorize another rule, etc.²

On page 1 of lesson 1, the first thing we were assigned to do was to memorize the various forms of the Greek word for *river*: ποταμός.

¹ It is a nominative, even though the form looks accusative.

² This was probably the same teaching technique used by Erasmus with his students in A.D. 1520.



EAGER TO GO

LESSON I

DECLENSION OF O-STEMS

ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος. — *In the beginning was the word.*¹

1. **Declensions.** There are three declensions in Greek, instead of five as in Latin. To these, because of their general uniformity, the *o*-stems serve as a good introduction.

2. **O-Stem Masculines.** Nouns of the *o*-declension whose nominatives end in **-os** are usually masculine.

ὁ ποταμός *the river*

	SINGULAR		PLURAL
N. ²	ὁ ποταμός -us ³	οἱ ποταμοί -ī ³	
G.	τοῦ ποταμοῦ -ī	τῶν ποταμῶν -ōrum	
D.	τῷ ποταμῷ -ō	τοῖς ποταμοῖς -īs	
A.	τὸν ποταμόν -um	τοὺς ποταμούς -ūs	

We continued to have the teacher give us rules to memorize, and short made-up phrases to illustrate them. It was not until lesson 12 that we actually got to work with an actual bit of Greek text by an ancient author!

This teaching strategy is called *deductive*, and I found it to be a soul-destroying way to learn.

In contrast, when I moved to Japan, I lived in a community of 75,000 people where I was the only native English speaker. My learning style was strongly *inductive*. I did not start with rules and made-up phrases. I started by learning things that were immediately useful (e.g. to ask for directions to the nearest bathroom—there is nothing more useful than that!). It was learn Japanese or starve.

I can still remember my delight when I learned how to express *obligation*. I would get into social situations in the evening, and while I knew how to say, *I go, I went, I will go*, I did not know how to say *I have to go now; I must leave*.

Japanese has a convoluted verb form it uses to express obligation which roughly translates as *It is better that I do such-and-such than that I don't*. I learned that verb form one day, and I was able to make practical use of it that very evening. Although it was complicated, I never forgot it.

When I was studying languages¹ in university and seminary, I never found morphology memorization as easy as I did in Japan.

In time, after learning a good bit of useful Japanese, I began to understand what made the language tick—I began to learn the rules. Even more, I started to learn to read and write.

I bought a 4 meter sailboat that I would take out on the sea during my days off. On one of those trips, I was several miles offshore when I was surprised to be overtaken by an enormous thunderstorm. This left me highly motivated to learn to read the daily weather forecast from the newspaper.

Rather than starting a learn-to-read-Japanese textbook that taught me the names of different sorts of fruit, I started with the characters for *Wind from the north* (北風). I moved on from there to other wind directions, eventually learning to read, *Clear skies in the morning. Light winds from the southwest, with showers developing in the afternoon; winds strengthening to 15 knots. Thunderstorms overnight*.

By the time I left Japan, I had learned the two indigenous Japanese alphabets, as well as 700+ ideograms. This was not enough to read a newspaper article (for which I would have needed around 5,000 ideograms), but I was able to read and understand entire weather forecasts. Equally important, my ability to *speak* Japanese was up to a level where I could carry on a conversation with a taxi driver.

When I began teaching Greek, I determined to teach it the way I had learned Japanese: by starting with things people were motivated to read, teaching

¹ 2 years of Hebrew, 3 years of Spanish, and 5 years of Ancient Greek.

them—at least initially—only how to do that, and not to teach them things they did not need.

I discovered there was a retired Wycliffe Bible translator from New Zealand named Ross McKerras who had developed a series of YouTube videos where he taught Greek inductively, based on his experience of acquiring (and translating) several languages from the South Pacific region.

Take a look at the first lesson, and notice that even when it comes to the Greek alphabet, he teaches only the letters needed to understand the Bible verse he is touching on.

<https://youtu.be/fjv3eP4kfrM>

I sought to emulate his approach in my classes. To simplify the task for my students as I got them into the New Testament right from lesson 1, I focused in on verses that used a predicate nominative structure. God is light. God is love. I am the light of the world.

This let me be very controlled in how I introduced genitive, accusative, and dative cases.

I followed McKerras' approach in introducing the Greek alphabet only on an as-needed basis. This meant that my students did not finish learning the entire Greek alphabet until they had 15 hours of class time with me.

Here is a video I made early on in my teaching career, which will give you a feel for how I worked with—and then extended—McKerras' approach.

<https://dailydoseofgreek.com/greek-resources/shortnin-bread-greek-alphabet-song-2/>

After 25 hours of class time, I moved beyond predicate nominatives and got into translating a biblical book. I taught the vocabulary and grammar they needed for chapter 1, verse 1, and I taught them to make use of:

www.STEPBible.com.¹

¹ I started them off in Acts, since that was a book that I was translating myself at that time. This was a dreadful mistake.

Luke is, along with Paul, Daniel and Moses, a biblical author that received the equivalent of a top-flight university

My instructional strategy has evolved as have I learned more about teaching. This video represents the basic strategy I am using right now.

<https://dailydoseofgreek.com/greek-resources/translation-worksheets-by-bob-goethe/>

I am convinced that teaching Greek inductively is the right approach. My students have all learned Greek much faster than I ever did. I do not think this is because I am such a great instructor, as such. I think inductive learning is superior to deductive learning when it comes to language acquisition.

Defining Fluency

It is not realistic to expect my students to ever learn Greek as thoroughly as did F.F. Bruce—who had the entire Greek New Testament committed to memory.

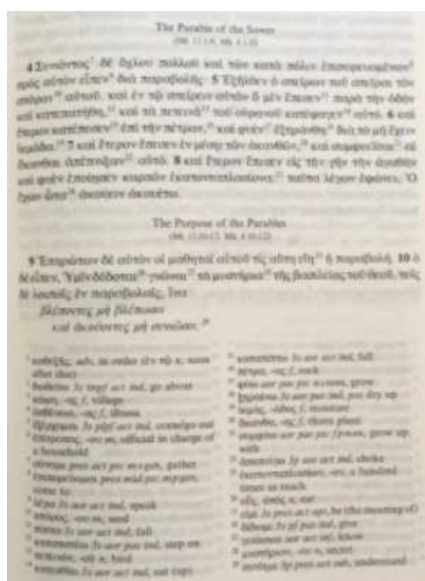
There are hundreds of words that occur only once in the NT. Trying to memorize them would be an enormous amount of work for not much benefit.

Rather, my instructional goal is built around being able to make effective use of a Reader's Edition of the Greek New Testament. The one I recommend is:

<https://a.co/d/4ZvRGap>

education, and his writing style is difficult. After my students had struggled through 5 chapters in Acts, we switched over to the Gospel of John, which is a much, much

better choice as a curriculum for novice Greek students.



In this edition, there are footnotes at the bottom of each page defining all the uncommon words that are used in the page above, where *uncommon* is all the words used 30 times or less in the NT.

So I am looking for my students to learn all the vocabulary items used more than 30 times, plus all the grammar they need to understand those words in context.

My goal for my students is that they become *fluent* in NT Greek, and I define *fluency* as:

Being able to keep a reader's edition of the Greek NT at the head of your bed, and being able to read 15 or 20 verses, thinking about how they might apply to your life, before turning out the light to go to sleep.

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- .

Index

- Accents in Paul's Day4:9, the Fine Print
 Accusative-Subject-with-Infinitive..1:7, 1:8,
 2:12
 Adjectives..... 4:8, 4:10
 Ancient Authors
 Aeschylus 1:6 (footnote)
 Aesop.....2:15
 Aristotle..... 2:3, 2:11, 2:20
 Chrysostom.....2:7
 Euripides 1:6 (footnote)
 Eusebius2:14, Introduction>First Century
 Chronology (footnote)
 Gamaliel..... 2:9, 4:11
 Herodotus..... 1:6 (footnote), 4:16
 Hippocrates.....2:3
 Homer1:9 (footnote), 2:20, 4:13 (footnote)
 Isocrates2:11
 Josephus2:14
 Livy2:19
 Oxyrhynchus Papyri1:1, Chap. 4, Paul and
 Matthew's Gospel
 Pausanias 1:7 (footnote)
 Pausanias2:19
 Plato ...2:3, 2:4, 2:11, 2:20, 4:13 (footnote)
 Polybius 1:7 (footnote)
 Solon2:20
 Sophocles 2:3, 4:13 (footnote)
 Strabo..... 1:6 (footnote), 1:9
 Suetonius.....2:2
 Tertullian 1:1 (footnote)
 Thucydides..... 2:3, 4:16
 Tombstones, etc.....2:17
 Aorist Subjunctive.....4:15
 Apostle.....2:7
 Article-Noun-Article-Adjective2:1
 Aspect2:6
 BDAG and LSJ
 Role in Our Undersanding.....4:14
 Behold..... Translation Helps>WWLLS
 Brothers and Sisters..... 1:4, 2:1, 2:9, 2:14
 Cellphone Data on Church Attendance .2:16
 Codex Vaticanus 1:8
 Conjunctions
 Doubling 1:5
 Defective Verbs.....2:1
 Deponent Verb 1:6 (footnote), 2:12
 Elision 1:5
 Equative Nominative1:6, 2:1, 2:5, 2:20, 4:3, 4:9
 Fronting 1:9, 2:1
 Generic Masculine..... 1:4, 2:1, 2:9, 2:14, 4:13
 Genitive Absolute.....3:6
 Genitive of Time2:9, 3:10
 Glory2:6, 2:20
 Gospel vs. Good News1:5
 Greek Article vs. English Article..... See 1:9
 Indicative Voice, Use of3:5
 Junia.....2:7
 Lisa LaFlamme .. Translation Helps>WWLLS
 Literacy Levels in Canada2:4
 LSJ and BDAG
 Role in Our Undersanding4:14
 Lunatic Fringe.....4:12
 Macedonia and Achaia1:7
 Main Verb2:7
 MainVerb-Participle-Participle Structure1:4
 Martin Luther4:11
 Masculine Generic..... 1:4, 2:1, 2:9, 2:14, 4:13
 Merchant Missionaries.....1:8
 Nominative
 Equative or Predicate1:6, 2:1, 2:5, 4:3, 4:9
 Obsolete English Words
 Dropsy Translation Helps>WWLLS
 Gentile2:16
 Glory2:12
 Gospel 1:5
 Optative Mood3:11, 3:12
 Participle
 Aspect2:6
 Temporal..... 1:2-3, 2:6

Index

with Article	1:7
Passive Voice.....	1:8
Paul's Ministry Models	
Disciple-Making	1:6, 2:8, 3:4
Missionary Engagement	1:8
Perfect Tense	1:4, 1:8
Persian Christians.....	1:8
Peter & Andrew	2:6
Predicate Nominative .	1:6, 2:1, 2:5, 4:3, 4:9
Prepositional Phrases	1:2-3
Prepositions	
Changing Form (Elision)	2:6
Present Tense	1:2-3
Punctuation in Koine Greek	1:5
Relative Clause.....	1:10
Relative Pronoun	1:10
Roman Life Expectancy	4:13
Roman Roads.....	4:10
Romans 12.3	1:6
Silk Road Missions.....	1:8
Silvanus	1:1

STEPBible	
Use to Look Up Phrase.....	3:5
Subjunctive Voice, Use of.....	3:5
Textual Variants	Translation Helps
Untranslatable	1:4
The Gospel vs. The Good News	2:2, 2:4
Time	
Relative vs. Absolute	2:6
Transitive Verb	1:4
Translation Target Audience	1:5
Verb Tenses in English vs. Greek	2:1
Verbs of Remembering/Forgetting	1:2-3
Verse Divisions	2:16 (footnote)
Via Egnatia	4:10
Vocative Case	1:4, 2:1, 2:9, 2:14, 4:13
αὐτοὶ	2:1
καὶ at Beginning of Verse	1:6
καὶ...καὶ.....	1:1, 1:5
ὁ θεός vs. θεός.....	1:2
הָיָה.....	2:7
כִּי.....	1:8

About the Author

Bob Goethe began his Greek studies with two years of Classical Greek (1972-74) while working toward his bachelor's degree at the University of Alberta. He followed that with three years of Koine Greek studies during a Master of Divinity program (1974-1977).

Shortly after graduation, he went to Japan for two years as a missionary. Upon returning, he worked for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in Canada. A fellow staff-worker and he developed a passion for equipping students to follow Jesus after graduation from college/university, and ran a number of *Building the Kingdom on the Job* conferences.

After a time, they both decided they wanted to explore in practice those things they had been teaching students. So they left IV staff and got *regular jobs*—with Bob's friend selling radiation detection equipment, and he himself in medical software development.

A decade after getting into these jobs, these two decided to form their own company to make software to be used in the process of diagnosing breast cancer. There were three other companies in their market niche, and while they all enjoyed moderate commercial success for a few years, there were forces in the marketplace that made it hard to prosper over the long haul. One company decided that their survival strategy was to buy a competitor...and Bob and his partner decided their survival strategy was to get bought.

Their company lasted 10 years—which is more than a lot of small businesses. But starting a company from scratch was a good bit harder than either of them expected. Though they would not have had as much fun, they decided in the end that they might have done as well financially by working as baristas at a Starbucks for that decade.

The final decade of Bob's work life was spent developing custom software for a hospital group here in Canada. Ironically, he found that there was a lot more money in making sure doctors get their parking passes than there was in trying to cure

cancer. It was the years working for this hospital group that made retirement possible for Bob. *Except for them*, he has said, *I would likely be wearing a blue vest and welcoming people to Walmart today.*

Starting in 2002, translating from the New Testament became the core of Bob's daily quiet time, with taking a year off once or twice every decade to read through the Old Testament.

Since retiring, Bob has gotten pretty heavily involved in teaching Greek—and is very interested in helping to develop tools that can be made available for free to believers in the Global South.

During Covid Bob offered a Greek class by Zoom to adults in his church. That grew to the extent that he organized a second class that had people from across four time zones in Canada. Then, seemingly out of the blue, he had a seminary in New Delhi, India, contact him and ask if he could teach their students Greek via Zoom.

While the local seminary in Edmonton, Canada, stopped offering Greek classes to students, because of a total lack of interest by students,¹ 33 out of the 50 students of the school in New Delhi signed up for Bob's class. He also discovered, when he asked them what their objectives were, that 30 of them had the desire to become active in cross-cultural missions. Bob has said:

There is no way I would find any group of Christian young adults in Canada—even at a Bible school or seminary—where 90% were interested in becoming missionaries. It rather gives one the sense that Canada is a spiritual backwater, compared to parts of the Global South.

One of my students in India just finished 40 days where he set up a book table to give away New Testaments in the courtyard of a Hindu temple where they were celebrating a festival devoted to Ganesha, the elephant-headed god.

I was a bit concerned for his safety. Paul preached about Jesus in the courtyard of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, and humanly speaking, it didn't go all that well for him.

¹ They replaced their Greek and Hebrew classes with a Mickey Mouse class on *How to Use a Bible Dictionary*.

About the Author

However, my friend did not suffer from any violence, and managed to give away over a thousand Bibles.

In addition to his ongoing work in the New Testament, he has begun translating from Aurelius as well as Herodotus.